

# Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

- 1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about presidential elections



Putonghua pronunciation: *ge2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gok3*

Meanings: loft, cabinet, threshold, boudoir, pavilion

閣 (radical 門 *men2*, door) means 閣樓 (*ge2 lou2* = raised-tower/storey = loft). 藏書閣 (*cang2 jing1 ge2* = hide/store-sutras/scriptures~loft) = monastery-library. 束之高閣 (*shu4 zhi1 gao1 ge2* = bind/leave-it~high~loft) = idea/plan stalled.

Girl inhabiting 閨閣 (*gui1 ge2* = lady's~boudoir) 出閣 (*chu1 ge2* = exit~boudoir = gets married). 內閣 (*nei4 ge2* = inside~rooms, cabinet ministers' chambers) = cabinet. Prime Minister 組閣 (*zu3 ge2* = forms~cabinet). Ministers 入閣 (*ru4 ge2* = enter/join~cabinet), become 閣員 (*ge2 yuan2* = cabinet members).

影子內閣 (*ying3 zi0 nei4 ge2* = shadow~diminutive~cabinet) = opposition's shadow cabinet. 走馬燈內閣 (*zou3 ma3 deng1 nei4 ge2* = galloping-horse~lantern~cabinet) means shaky cabinet repeatedly changing hands, spinning around non-stop like a Chinese hot-air rotating lantern.

by Diana Yue