

# 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 partying

夜

Putonghua pronunciation: *ye 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ye 6*

Meanings: night

夜 succeeds 日 (*ri 4*, sun/day). Mothers 日夜禱告 (*ri 4 ye 4 dao 3 gao 4* = day~night-pray~tell/beseech = pray day-and-night) for troops' return. Students 開夜車 (*kai 1 ye 4 che 4* = start/drive~night~car = cram for exams). 三更 (*san 1 geng 1* = third~gong) is midnight (night-watch gong sounds at 8pm, 10pm, midnight, 2am, 4am, 6am).

Playboys 夜夜笙歌 (*ye 4 ye 4 sheng 1 ge 1* = night-night-reed-pipe-songs = lead merry/party-going lifestyle). 錦衣夜行 (*jin 3 yi 1 ye 4 xing 2* = brocade~clothes~night~walk = wearing finery in darkness) laments beauty/value going unnoticed.

Tourists see 香港之夜 (*Xiang 1 Gang 3 zhi 1 ye 4* = Hong-Kong~'s ~night = Hong Kong by night), have 宵夜 (*xiao 1 ye 4* = night-night = late-night snacks). Party-crashers feel “夜未央” (*ye 4 wei 4 yang 1* = night~not~yet~end = “The night is still young!”)

by Diana Yue