

# 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 flowers

香

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *heung1*

Meanings: fragrant, aroma, incense

香 = 香氣 (*xiang1 qi4* = fragrant/nice~vapor/smell), 香味 (*xiang1 wei4* = fragrant/nice-smell/taste). 香水 (*xiang1 shui3* = fragrant~water = perfumes) have 花香 (*hua1 xiang1* = flowers~fragrance). Chefs use 香草 (*xiang1 cao3* = aromatic~herbs), 香料 (*xiang1 liao4* = fragrant~material = spices). Oven-fresh cakes 香噴噴 (*xiang1 en4 pen4* = fragrant~puff~puff = whiffing aroma).

香 also means incense/joss-stick: 香爐 (*xiang1 lu2* = incense~oven = incense-burner), 燒香 (*shao1 xiang1* = burn~incense/joss-sticks). 香港 (English name “Hong Kong”, Putonghua *Xiang1 Gang3*, Cantonese *Heung1 Gong2* = joss-sticks~harbor) got her name from exporting joss-sticks.

Poets praise 梅花 (*mei2 hua1* = plum~blossoms)’s 幽香 (*you1 xiang1* = subtle~fragrance). Philosophers adore serene 蓮花 (*lian2 hua1* = lotus~flowers): 香遠益清 (*xiang1 yuan3 yi1 qing1* = “Fragrance~carried~afar~even~purer!”)

by Diana Yue