

# 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 the Olympic Games



Putonghua pronunciation: *shang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: verb/adverb *sheung5*  
adjective *seung6*

Meanings: up, above, forward, mount, rise, ascend, advance

Antonyms 上下 (*shang4 xia4* = up~down) show finger pointing upwards/downwards from horizon. 上面 (*shang4 mian4* = up~face) = above. 上策 (*shang4 ce4* = top~strategy) = best/preferred idea/plan. 上流 (*shang4 liu2* = upper~flow) describes river's 上游 (*shang4 yiu2* = up~stream) or decent/high-class people.

Rider/project 上馬 (*shang4 ma3* = up~horse = mounts/is launched). Company 上市 (*shang4 shi4* = mounts~market = goes public). Competitor has 上進心 (*shang4 jin4 xin1* = forward~advance~heart = positiveness/ambition), 力爭上游 (*li4 zheng1 shang4 you2* = strength/effort~vie~up~stream = fights hard to overtake others). Soldiers charge, crying: “上!” (*shang4* = “Forward!”)

Sage warns: 上山容易下山難 (*shang4 shan1 rong2 yi4 xia4 shan1 nan2* = up~hill~allowable~easy~down~hill~difficult = It's easier to escalate/grow than down-size/retreat).

by Diana Yue