

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 antiques

銅

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung4*

Meaning: copper, bronze, brass

銅 (radical 金 *jin1*, gold/metal) = 紅銅 (*hong2 tong2* = red/pure-copper), 黃銅 (*huang2 tong2* = yellow-copper = brass). 銅樂隊 (*tong2 yue4 dui4* = brass-music-team) = brass band.

銅板 (*tong2 ban3* = copper-flat-piece) = 銅錢 (*tong2 bi4* = copper-money) = copper coin. 銅牆鐵壁 (*tong2 qiang2 tie3 bi4* = bronze-walls-iron-walls) describes impenetrable building/vault.

Ancient Chinese 煉銅 (*lian4 tong2* = smelted-copper), added 錫 (*xi1*, tin), produced bronze. Old 銅鼎 (*tong2 ding3* = bronze-tripods/dings), 銅鏡 (*tong2 jing4* = bronze-mirrors), 銅劍 (*tong2 jian4* = bronze-swords) develop 銅綠 (*tong2 lu4* = bronze's-green-rust). Hence the Chinese terms 青銅器 (*qing1 tong2 qi4* = green-bronze-utensils = bronzes), 青銅時代 (*qing1 tong2 shi2 dai4* = bronze-time-period = the bronze age).

by Diana Yue