

# 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

聚

Putonghua pronunciation: *ju 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juí 6*

Meanings: concentrate, assemble, gathering

聚 = assemble/concentrate: 短聚 (*duan3 ju4* = short-gathering), 重聚 (*chong2 ju4* = again-meet), family's Thanksgiving 團聚 (*tuan2 ju4* = circle-gather = reunion). 聚焦鏡 (*ju4 jiao1 jing4* = concentrate-sharp-point-mirror/lens) = focusing lens. Overseas Chinese 聚居 (*ju4 ju1* = congregate-reside/settle) in Chinatowns.

Church-goers attend 聚會 (*ju4 hui4* = assemble-meeting = assembly/service), 聚精會神 (*ju4 jing1 hui4 shen2* = concentrate-essence~assemble-spirit = concentrate) on sermon. Friends 歡聚 (*huan1 ju4* = joyous-gather = enjoy get-together) at Christmas 聚餐 (*ju4 can1* = gather-feast = dinner gathering).

Leader's 凝聚力 (*ning2 ju4 li4* = concentrate-gather~power = ability to draw/unite/stabilize supporters) strengthens party's solidarity. 聚寶盆 (*ju4 bao3 pan2* = assemble-treasures-pan/bowl = fairy's bowl miraculously yielding treasures) describes capital/wealth-attracting hubs like Hong Kong.

by Diana Yue