

# 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 leisure

忙

Putonghua pronunciation: *mang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mong4*

Meanings: busy, hasty

Character 忙 = 忄 (= 心 *xin1*, heart) + 亡 (*wang2*, die/dead): 大忙人 (*da4 mang2 ren2* = big/very~busy~person)'s heart/soul is often dead/insensitive.

Bees/hardworking people are always 忙碌 (*mang2 lu4* = busy/laboring), 忙十著工作 (*mang2 zhe0 gong1 zuo2* = busy~continuous~ work-labor = busy working). Aborted projects mean 白忙 (*bai2 mang2* = white/empty~busy = work wasted).

In 忙亂 (*mang2 luan4* = busy/hasty~confused/disorganized) situation we 慌忙 (*huang1 mang2* = panic~busy = hastily/desperately) ask friends to 幫忙 (*bang1 mang2* = help-busy = help). “幫幫忙!” (*bang1 bang1 mang2* = help-help~busy) = “幫個忙!” (*bang4 ge4 mang2* = give~a~help) = “Please, help/spare me!” 幫倒忙 (*bang1 dao3 mang2* = help~overthrow~busy) = try to help but make things worse.

by Diana Yue