

# 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 mahjong

搓

Putonghua pronunciation: *cuo1*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *choh1*  
Meanings: rub, massage, knead

搓 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 搓揉 (*cuo1 rou2* = rub~rubbing). Body massage includes 搓腰 (*cuo1 yao1* = rubbing/massaging~waist), 搓背 (*cuo1 bei4* = rubbing/massaging~back). Baker 搓麵團 (*cuo1 mian4 tuan2* = rub~noodle~ball = rolls/kneads dough), 搓來搓去 (*cuo1 lai2 cuo1 qu4* = rub/roll~come~rub/roll~go = roll/knead back and forth). Impatient person 搓手頓足 (*cuo1 shou3 dun4 zu2* = rubs~hands~stamps~feet), leisurely person 輕搓慢撚 (*qing1 cuo1 man4 nian3* = lightly~rub~slowly~twist = acts with deliberate slowness).

打麻將 (*da3 ma2 jiang4* = hit/eject~mahjong = playing mahjong) is also called 搓麻將 (*cuo1 ma2 jiang4* = rubbing~mahjong) or 搓牌 (*cuo1 pai2* = rubbing~tiles), 搓 meaning pushing/stirring tiles into disarray before piling them into “four-sided citadel” for next game.

by Diana Yue