

# 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 surgical operations

微

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mei*

Meaning: small, tiny, mini-, micro-, fine, delicate

微 (radical 彳 *chi4*, small step) means 微弱 (*wei ruo4* = small/fine-slight/weak): 微風 (*wei feng1* = light-wind/breeze), 微溫 (*wei wen1* = slightly-warm), 微積分 (*wei ji fen1* = micro-accumulated-points = calculus), 微波爐 (*wei bo lu2* = microwave-oven). 衰微 (*shuai wei* = weakens-shrinks), scion feels 卑微 (*bei wei* = debased-lowly/insignificant).

精微 (*jing1 wei* = fine-intricate) describes penetrative knowledge/art. Mona Lisa's 微笑 (*wei xiao4* = light-laugh/grin = smile) is 微妙 (*wei miao4* = delicate-intriguing/enticing). 微塵 (*wei chen2* = tiny-dust-particles) reflect 微觀宇宙 (*wei guan1 yu3 zhou4* = micro-scope-physical-dimensions-temporal-dimensions = microscopic universe).

After 微創手術 (*wei chuang1 shou3 shu4* = minimal-injury-hands-method = minimally-invasive surgery), patient 輕微發燒 (*qing1 wei fal shaol* = slightly-develops-fever).

by Diana Yue