

# 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 beginning and end

層

Putonghua pronunciation: *ceng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chang4*

Meaning: layer, tier, stratum

層 (radical 尸 *shī1*, person/corpse) means [layer: 岩層 (*yan2 ceng2* = rock-layers), 雲層 (*yūn2 ceng2* = cloud-stratum/strata), 層巒疊嶂 (*ceng2 luan2 die2 zhang4* = tiers-of-hills-piled-up-mountains). 千層糕 (*qian1 ceng2 gao1* = thousand-layer-cake) is custard in mille-feuille.

Youths needn't be myopic. Life has many 層面 (*ceng2 mian4* = tiers-faces/aspects/facets), 層次 (*ceng2 ci4* = levels-grades/shades). Look beyond 一層樓 (*yi1 ceng2 lou2* = one-storey-building = an apartment/condo/flat). Opportunities 層出不窮 (*ceng2 chu1 bu4 qiong2* = layer-out-no-exhaust = are endless). Promoted from 低層 (*di1 ceng2* = lower/bottom-stratum) to 中層 (*zhong1 ceng2* = middle-stratum) to 高層 (*gao1 ceng2* = upper/top-level) management, graduate's perspectives 更上一層樓 (*geng4 shang4 yi1 ceng2 lou2* = more-up-one-storey-building = rise to new heights).

by Diana Yue