

# 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 the prodigal son

恕

Putonghua pronunciation: *shu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sue3*

Meanings: forgive, spare, pardon

恕 (radical 心 (*xin1* = heart) means 恕罪 (*shu4 zui4* = forgive~sin/offence). Benevolent ruler 饒恕 (*rao2 shu4* = spare~forgive = pardons), 赦免 (*she4 mian3* = spare~exempt = spares) disobedient subject.

恕 indicates polite tone of voice. Sign outside restaurant says “吸煙者恕不招待” (*xi1 yan1 zhe3 shu4 bu4 zhao1 dai4* = inhale~smoke~person~forgive~not~beckon~treat = “Our apologies: smokers are not allowed”). “恕難從命!” (*shu4 nan2 cong2 ming4* = forgive~difficult~follow~order = “Sorry, can’t obey your order”) is a polite but firm refusal.

Moralists preach 忠恕之道 (*zhong1 shu4 zhi1 dao4* = loyal~forgive~’s~principle = act honestly/loyally and be generous/forgiving to others). 仁慈 (*ren2 ci2* = benevolent~kind) father 寬恕 (*kuan1 shu4* = broad/lenient~forgive = forgives) prodigal son.