

# 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 flowers

殘

Putonghua pronunciation: *can2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chaan4*

Meanings: disabled, incomplete, shrinking, remnant

殘 (radical 歹 *dai3*, bad/evil) = hurt/partially-destroy: 殘暴 (*can2 bao4* = hurt-violent/cruel) despot, 殘廢 (*can2 fei4* = hurt-disabled) cripple/deaf-mute. Masochist 自殘 (*zi4 can2* = self-maim = inflict wound on himself). 殘羹冷飯 (*can2 geng1 leng3 fan4* = leftover~soup~cold~rice) = unappetizing leftovers.

殘月 (*can2 yue4* = incomplete~moon) = thin waning moon. 殘夜 (*can2 ye4* = incomplete~night) = what's left of the sad night. 急景殘年 (*ji1 jing3 can2 nian2* = hurrying~scenes~almost-gone-year) gives people the year-end blues. 收拾殘局 (*shou1 shi2 can2 ju* = collect~pick~remnant~game) means conclude chess endgame or round up messy situation.

Storm 摧殘 (*cui1 can2* = destroy~maim = destroys) crops. 殘花敗柳 (*can2 hua1 bai4 liu3* = withered~flower~declined~willow) describes dying plants or sexually-exploited woman.

by Diana Yue