

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 呀

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 hiking

足

Putonghua pronunciation: *zu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juk1*

Meanings: foot

足 = 腳 (*jiao3* = foot/feet). 足浴 (*zu2 yu4* = foot-bath) soothes 足部 (*zu2 bu4* = foot-part). 香港腳 (*xiang1 gang3 jiao3* = Hong Kong foot) is 足疾 (*zu2 ji2* = foot-disease). 足跡 (*zu2 zhi1* = foot-track) = footprint.

Ecstatic person 手舞足蹈 (*shou3 wu3 zu2 dao3* = hands-wave-feet-dance = waves hands and feet). 手足 (*shou3 zu2* = hand-foot) also means brother/buddy.

Women who 纏足 (*chan2 zu2* = bound-their-feet) had 小腳 (*xiao2 jiao3* = small-feet = bound feet). Today Chinese women have 天足 (*tian1 zu2* = nature/natural-feet = unbound feet), can 赤足 (*chi4 zu2* = go bare-feet), 遠足 (*yuan3 zu2* = far-foot = go hiking), 踢足球 (*ti4 zu2 qiu2* = kick-foot-ball = play football/soccer).

by Diana Yue