

# 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 pine-trees

松

Putonghua pronunciation: *song1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chung4*

Meanings: pin-tree

松 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood/tree) = 松樹 (*song1 shu4* = pine~trees)  
松林 (*song1 lin2* = pine~forest), 松針 (*song1 zhen1* = pine~needles). 松濤 (*song1 tao2* = pine-tree~waves) = soothing of wind rustling through pine-trees.

松木 (*song1 mu4* = pine~wood) contains 松脂 (*song1 zhi1* = pine~fat = resin). 松鼠 (*song1 shu3* = pine~mouse/rate = squirrels) collect 松實 (*song1 shi2* = pine~fruit/cones), eat 松仁 (*song1 ren2* = pine~nuts).

松 is 常綠樹 (*chang2 lu4 shu4* = constant/ever~green~tree). In paintings depicting 松柏長青 (*song1 bai3 chang2 qing1* = pine~cypress~forever~green = pine-cypress duo) and 松鶴延年 (*song1 he4 yan2 nian2* = pine~stork~extend~years = pine-stork duo), 古松 (*gu3 song1* = ancient/centuries-old~pine-trees) symbolize 長壽 (*chang2 shou4* = long~age = longevity).