

# 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

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meanings: breath, gas, qi, energy

氣 = air/gas: 空氣 (*kong1 qi4* = empty-gas = air), 氧氣 (*yang3 qi4* = oxygen-gas), 喜氣 (*xi3 qi4* = happy/cheerful-air/expression), 怒氣 (*nu4 qi4* = angry-puff = anger/ire), 生氣 (*sheng1 qi4* = grow-angry). Teenagers have 青春氣息 (*qing1 chun1 qi4 xi1* = green-spring-breath-exhaled-air = zest of youth). Patient 恢復元氣 (*hui1 fu2 yuan2 qi4* = recovers-primary-energy = re-gains energy/health), goes hiking, enjoys 天朗氣清 (*tian1 lang3 qi4 qing1* = sky-sunny-air-clean/pure = fine weather). In Chinese philosophy/medicine, 氣 (*qi4*) means energy-flow. 氣功 (*qi4 gong1* = breathing-exercise/kungfu = qi-gong) practitioner 養氣 (*yang3 qi4* = cultivates-energy), 運氣 (*yun4 qi4* = summons/musters-energy). Singers use 丹田之氣 (*dan1 tian2 zhi1 qi4* = pubic-region-'s-breath = deep breath from below diaphragm).

by Diana Yue