

# 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 change of weather

乾

Putonghua pronunciation: *gan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gon1*

Meaning: dry, dehydrated

乾 (radical 乙 *yi3*, second) = dry: 乾瘦 (*gan1 shou4* = dry-thin/lean), 乾旱 (*gan1 han3* = dry-arid/parched). Laundry needs 風乾 (*feng1 gan1 rou4* = wind-dried), 曬乾 (*sai4 gan1* = sun-dried). Washed face feels 乾淨 (*gan1 jing4* = dry-clean = clean), 乾爽 (*gan1 shuang3* = dry-crisp).

Autumn's 乾燥 (*gan1 zao4* = dry-flammable) weather makes crops 枯乾 (*ku1 gan1* = wither-dry-up), farmers 乾急 (*gan1 ji2* = uselessly/helplessly-agitate). 乾柴烈火 (*gan1 cai2 lie4 huo3* = dry-firewood-violent-fire) describes blazing fire, sizzling romance/lust.

乾哭 (*gan1 ku1* = dry-weep/cry) = pretend to weep/cry, not shedding tears. 乾笑 (*gan1 xiao4* = dry-laugh) = expressionless/feigned-laugh/cackle. 外強中乾 (*wai4 qiang2 zhong1 gan1* = outwardly-strong-inwardly-dry) describes family/business keeping impressive façade but already drained empty.

by Diana Yue