

# 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 breathing



呼 (radical 口 *kou3* = mouth)

Putonghua pronunciation: *tu3, tu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to3*

Meanings: exhale, spit, vomit, discharge

吐 = discharge through mouth/nose: 吐痰 (*tu3 tan2* = spit-out-phlegm), 嘔吐 (*ou3 tu4* = vomit-spit = vomiting), 吐血 (*tu4 xue4* = vomit~blood). 吐露心聲 (*tu3 lu4 xin1 sheng1* = spit~reveal~heart's~sounds) = confess feelings. 吐苦水 (*tu3 ku2 shui3* = spit-out~bitter~water) = tell unhappy experiences.

Port's 吞吐量 (*ten1 tu4 liang4* = swallow~spit-out~volume) = cargo handling capacity. Pipe-smoker 吞雲吐霧 (*ten1 yun2 tu4 wu4* = swallow~cloud~spit-out~fog = puffs smoke). 吞吞吐吐 (*ten1 ten1 tu4 tu4* = swallow~swallow~spit~spit) = stammering/speaking hesitantly.

Persons with grudge 不吐不快 (*bu4 tu3 bu4 kuai4* = no~spit/speak~no~cheer/happy = feel pressing desire to speak up). Underdog who overcomes hardships/discrimination finally 吐氣揚眉 (*tu3 qi4 yang2 mei2* = blows-out~gas/air/anger~raises/arches~eye-brows = is proudly triumphant).

by Diana Yue