

# 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 feeling miserable

愁

Putonghua pronunciation: *chou2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sau4*

Meanings: sadness, worry, lack

Character 愁 = 秋 (*qiu1*, autumn) + 心 (*xin1*, heart), means sad/forlorn. Rich kids 不愁衣食 (*bu4 chou2 yi1 shi2* = do-not-worry/lack~clothes~food). 少年不知愁滋味 (*shao4 nian2 bu4 zhi1 chou2 zi1 wei4* = young-years~no~know~sadness~rich~taste) = in youth, you don't know what sadness tastes like.

Having experienced 憂愁 (*you1 chou2* = anxieties~worries), 哀愁 (*ai1 chou2* = sorrows~dejections), we know 酒入愁腸愁更愁 (*jiu3 ru4 chou2 chang2 chou2 geng4 chou2* = wine~into~sad~bowels~sad~even~more~sad) = drinking only makes you sadder.

天愁地慘 (*tian1 chou2 di4 can3* = heaven~sad~earth~woeful) describes earthquake-stricken terrifying landscape. Poet raises glass: 與爾同銷萬古愁 (*yu2 er3 tong2 xiao1 wan4 gu3 chou2* = with~you~together~forget~ten-thousand~ages~sadness = Let's drown our eternal sorrow in wine!)

by Diana Yue