

# 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 the *nouveau-riche*



Putonghua pronunciation: *hu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo6*

Meanings: door, house, household, abode

Pictograms 戶 (door-panel) + 門 (*men2*, facing door-panels) = 門戶 (*men2 hu4* = doors/house). 戶外 (*hu4 wai4* = house~outside) = outdoors.

Immigrants obtain 戶籍 (*hu4 ji2* = house~abode-registration = right of domicile), 安家落戶 (*an1 jia1 luo4 hu4* = furnish~home~settle~house = settle down), open 銀行戶口 (*yin2 hang2 hu4 kou3* = silver/money~firm~house~mouth/unit = bank accounts). City lights show 千門萬戶 (*qian1 men2 wan4 hu4* = thousand~doors~ten-thousand~households = countless households).

個體戶 (*ge4 ti3 hu4* = unit~body~household = individual running private/non-corporate business) makes money, becomes 暴發戶 (*bao4 fa1 hu4* = abrupt~rich~person = nouveau riche). Ruined 大戶人家 (*da4 hu4 ren2 jia1* = big~house~person~home = big/rich family) becomes 破落戶 (*po4 luo4 hu4* = bankrupt~fallen~family).

by Diana Yue