

# 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 canines

狼

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long4*

Meanings: wolf

狼 (radical 犭 = 犬 *qūan3*, dog) and 狗 (*gou3*, dogs) are cousins. 狼狗 (*lang2 gou3* = wolf~dog) = wolfhound. 狼狽 (*lang2 bei4* = wolf and clumsy short-legged wolf) describes people in embarrassing situations, e.g. rain-soaked. However, 狼狽為奸 (*lang2 bei4 wei2 jian1* = wolf~short-legged-wolf~are~evil) describes villains helping each other in crime.

Wolves are 兇狠 (*xiong1 hen3* = fierce~cruel). 如狼似虎 (*ru2 lang2 si4 hu3* = like~wolf~resemble~tiger) = fiercely feeding/predating. 狼子野心 (*lang2 zi3 ye3 xin1* = wolf~son~wild/disobedient~heart) describes ungrateful person turning against benefactor.

Wolves inspire poetry/myths. 天狼星 (*tian1 lang2 xing1* = celestial-wolf~star) = bright star Sirius. Mongolians worship 狼圖騰 (*lang2 tu2 teng2* = wolf~totem). Scary tales feature 狼人 (*lang2 ren2* = wolf~person/people = werewolves).

by Diana Yue