

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 surgical operations

Putonghua pronunciation: *feng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fung4*

Meaning: sew, slot, gap, seam, crack, fault

縫 (radical 糸 *si1*, thread/silk) means 縫紉 (*feng2 ren4* = sew-twist/join) = sewing with 針線 (*zhen1 xian4* = needle-thread), 裁縫 (*cai2 feng2* = make-pattern-sew = tailor) uses 縫紉機 (*feng2 ren4 ji1* = sewing-machine), 縫衣 (*feng2 yi1* = sews/makes-clothes). 裂縫 (*lie4 feng2* = break/crack-fault/gap) = crack/rift in rock/wall/friendship.

見縫插針 (*jian4 feng2 cha1 zhen1* = see-crack-insert-needle) means pushing/planting connections/influence wherever possible. 縫縫補補 (*feng2 feng2 bu3 bu3* = sew-sew-mend-mend) describes housewife mending clothes or plan repeatedly amended/patched up.

Dentist cleans patient's 牙縫 (*ya2 feng2* = teeth-spaces). Surgeon 縫合 (*feng2 he2* = suture/stitch-close = sews up) wound/incision, eliminating any 縫隙 (*feng2 xi4* = gap-small-space). 天衣無縫 (*tian1 yi1 wu2 feng2* = heaven-made-garment-has-no-seam/fault) describes seamless/perfect plan/cooperation.

by Diana Yue