

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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

納

Putonghua pronunciation: *na4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *naap6*

Meanings: inhale, accept, collect

納 = 接納 (*jie2 na4* = catch-take = accept), 容納 (*rong2 na4* = hold~contain). 納涼 (*na4 liang2* = absorb~cool) = cooling down in shade/breeze. 出納員 (*chu1 na4 yuan2* = out-in~member) = bookkeeper. Income-earners 納稅 (*na4 shui4* = give/pay~tax). Flexible leaders 採納 (*cai3 na4* = adopt~accept) contrarian views. 氣功 (*qi4 gong1* = breath~control-kungfu) is 吐納之術 (*tu4 na4 zhi1 shu4* = exhale~inhale~'s~methods = breathing methods). Reforms 吐故納新 (*tu3 gu4 na4 xin1* = discharge~old/used~take-in~new). Polygamist 納妾 (*na4 qie4* = takes~concubine). 納粹黨 (*na4 cui4 dang3* = accept~pure/elite~party) = “Nazi”-transliterated~Party.

“海納百川，有容乃大” (*hai3 na4 bai3 chuan1, you3 rong2 nai3 da4* = sea~takes-in~hundred~rivers, has~big-intake~thus~big) praises hero's broad/generous heart/vision.