

# 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 witches

魔

Putonghua pronunciation: *mo2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *moh1*

Meanings: devil, demon, monster, magic, mystic

魔 (radical 鬼 *gui3*, ghost) means 惡魔 (*e4 mo2* = fierce~demon = evil spirit/person). 妖魔鬼怪 (*yao1 mo2 gui3 guai4* = demon-devil-ghost~monster) collectively means evil powers. 驅魔人 (*qū1 mo2 ren2* = expel~demons~person = exorcist) fights 魔鬼 (*mo2 gui3* = demon-ghost = the Devil, devils).

變魔術 (*bian4 mo2 shu4* = change/transform~demon/magic~method/power) = play magic tricks. Patients fear 病魔 (*bing4 mo2* = sickness~demon = long/vicious illness). Women fear 色魔 (*se1 mo2* = color/women~demon = molesters/rapist-killers).

群魔亂舞 (*qūn2 mo2 luan4 wu3* = mob~demons~disorderly~dance) describes evil/lawless powers flexing muscles. Orthodox believers reject 邪魔外道 (*xie2 mo2 wai4 dao4* = evil~devils~outside~ways = heresy/heretics). Sage says: 魔由心生 (*mo2 you2 xin1 sheng1* = demon/evil~from~heart~rise = imagination/paranoia breeds fear/evil).

by Diana Yue