

# 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 stupid search

刻

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hak1*

Meanings: incise, carve, engrave

刻 (radical 丩 = 刀 *dao1*, knife) = 雕刻 (*diao1 ke4* = sculpt~carve/engrave). 刻意 (*ke4 yi4* = carve~idea) = deliberately. 深刻 (*shen1 ke4* = deep~engrave) describes deeply moving/analytical art/observation.

Artisans 刻石 (*ke4 shi2* = carve/engrave-on~stone), copying images/calligraphy. Ancient Chinese authors published 刻本 (*ke4 ben3* = carved~editions = books/writings carved on woodblocks and printed on paper). However, 刻版 (*ke4 ban3* = carve~block) describes routine/unimaginative activity.

Artists make 木刻 (*mu4 ke4* = wood~carve = woodcuts/wood-block prints). 刻印 (*ke4 yin4* = engrave~print/seal = carving characters on stone seal = seal-carving) is an art-form in China. 刻劃入微 (*ke4 hua4 ru4 wei1* = incise~draw~into~tiny) = detailed/fine description. 刻骨銘心 (*ke4 gu3 ming2 xin1* = carve~bone~engrave~heart) describes unforgettable romantic relationship.

by Diana Yue