

# 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

狠

Putonghua pronunciation: *hen3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *han2*

Meanings: fierce, cruel, pitiless

Characters 狼 (*lang2*, wolf) and 狠 share radical 犭 (= 犬 *quan3*, dog). 狠, short of 狼 (wolf) by just one dot, means 兇狠 (*xiong1 hen3* = fierce~cruel), like wolves.

狠毒 (*hen3 du2* = cruel~poisonous/evil) describes wicked intention/action. Crime-boss 心狠手辣 (*xin1 hen3 shou3 la4* = heart~cruel~hand~stinging-hot = thinks and acts mercilessly). Rapist-killer 手段狠毒 (*shou3 duan4 hen3 du2* = hand~means~cruel~evil = performs cruel acts).

狠 also means fiercely/forcefully/unreservedly. Released prisoner 狠吃一頓 (*hen3 chi1 yi1 dun4* = eats to his heart's content). Lucky speculator 狠賺一筆 (*hen3 zhuan4 yi1 bi3* = greatly~earn/win~one~amount = rakes in a big sum). Desperate grifter 狠賭一局 (*hen3 du3 yi1 ju2* = recklessly~gamble~one~round = risks big stakes in one go).

by Diana Yue