

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 呀

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 scandals

Putonghua pronunciation: **wen2**

Cantonese pronunciation: **man4**

Meaning: hear, smell, news, news story, famous

聞 (門 **men2**, door + 耳 **er3**, ear) means hear or what is heard/seen/known. 耳聞目見 (**er2 wen2 mu4 jian4** = ear-hear-eye-see) means things seen and heard. 聞 also means verb 嗅 (**chou4**, smell).

見聞廣博 (**jian4 wen2 guang3 bo2** = seen-heard-broad-expansive) describes well-exposed/knowledgeable person. 風聞 (**feng1 wen2** = wind-heard) = 傳聞 (**chuan2 wen2** = pass-around-heard) = piece of hearsay.

新聞學 (**xin1 wen2 xue2** = new/fresh-heard-study = study of news) = journalism. Reporters 跑新聞 (**pao3 xin1 wen2** = run-new/fresh-heard = run around gathering/reporting news). Tabloid-readers pass around 八卦新聞 (**ba1 gua4 xin1 wen2** = eight-symbols/trigrams-new/fresh-heard = gossipy news-stories), especially 聞人 (**wen2 ren2** = heard-about-persons = celebrities)' 醜聞 (**chou3 wen2** = ugly-news = dirty scandals).

by Diana Yue