

# 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 horses

Putonghua pronunciation: *bian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bin1*

Meaning: whip, lash, spur

鞭 (radical 革 *ge2*, leather) = 鞭子 (*bian1 zi0* = whip-diminutive = whip): 馬鞭 (*ma3 bian1* = horse-whip), 皮鞭 (*pi2 bian1* = leather-whip), 鞭打 (*bian1 da3* = whip-beat = inflict whipping), 鞭撻 (*bian1 ta4* = whip-beat/persecute physically/verbally).

However, 牛鞭 (*niu2 bian1* = bull's-whip) = bull's penis.

Jailer wields 藤鞭 (*teng2 bian1* = cane-whip), 鞭笞 (*bian1 chi1* = whips-canes) prisoner. Dead dictator gets 鞭屍 (*bian1 shi1* = whip-corpse = condemned/purged after death).

執教鞭 (*zhi2 jiao4 bian1* = take-up-teacher's-whip) = work as teacher. Stern teacher 鞭策 (*bian1 ce4* = whip-push = severely spurs) students on, but sometimes 鞭長莫及 (*bian1 chang2 mo4 ji2* = whip-long-cannot-reach = despite reaching out, object of outreach/attack is too far off).

by Diana Yue