

# 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 washing



Putonghua pronunciation: *chong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chung1*

Meanings: rinse, splash, flush, wash away

Pronunciation of 沖 resembles sound of rushing water (**CHONG1!**) 一飛沖天 (*yi1 fei1 chong1 tian1* = one-fly-rush-to-sky) describes spectacular soaring bird/plane. Floods 沖走 (*chong1 zou3* = wash-away) vegetation/houses, 沖散 (*chong1 san4* = wash-separate = uproot/disperse) crowds.

沖 means splash/plunge water/liquid on something: 沖洗 (*chong1 xi3* = rinse-wash) hair; 沖茶 (*chong1 cha2* = splash-tea = seep/brew tea leaves in boiling water); 沖廁 (*chong1 ce4* = flush-toilet). 沖膠卷 (*chong1 jiao1 juan4* = rinse-plastic-roll) = develop film. Medicinal 沖劑 (*chong1 ji4* = pour-dose = powdered medicine stirred/melted in hot water and then taken) is convenient for busy people.

Gentle, un-ambitious people are described as 沖和 (*chong1 he2* = wash-harmonious = mild), 沖虛 (*chong1 xu1* = wash-empty = humble/modest).

by Diana Yue