

# 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 baths and showers

擦

Putonghua pronunciation: *ca1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chaat3*

Meanings: rub, scrub, wipe, brush, near, touch

擦 (radical 扌 = 手, *shou3*, hand) means 揩擦 (*kai3 ca1* = swipe/wipe~rub/brush/scrub) with hand/cloth/utensil: 擦臉 (*ca1 lian3* = wipe/clean~face), 擦手 (*ca1 shou3* = wipe~hands), 擦地 (*ca1 di4* = scrub~the-floor). 磨擦 (*mo2 ca1* = rub~scrub) = friction/quarrel.

Bathroom/spa offers services: 擦身 (*ca1 shen1* = scrub~body), 擦背 (*ca1 bei4* = scrub/massage~back), 擦去 (*ca1 qu4* = scrub/scrape~away) dead skin, 擦油 (*ca1 you2* = rub-on~oil/lotion). However, 擦肩而過 (*ca1 jian1 er2 guo4* = rub~shoulders~and-pass) means narrowly missing someone/chance.

擦亮眼睛 (*ca1 liang4 yan3 jing1* = rub~bright~eyes~pupils) means closely/keenly watching events/facts/truth unfold. Slandered person wants to 洗擦污名 (*xi3 ca1 wu1 ming2* = wash~scrub/clean/cleanse~dirty~name). Cantonese colloquialism 擦鞋 (*ca1 xie2* = brush/shine~shoes) means flattery, licking someone's ass.

by Diana Yue