

# 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 walls

倒

Putonghua pronunciation: *dao 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do 2*

Meanings: fall, collapse, bend, reverse

Intransitive verb 倒 means fall. Termite-eaten wall 倒下 (*dao3 xia4* = falls~down). Earthquake-struck buildings 倒塌 (*dao3 ta1* = fall~collapse). Failed companies 倒閉 (*dao3 bi4* = fall~close = close down). 9-0 is 一面倒 (*yi2 mian4 dao3* = one~side~bend = lop-sided) score.

Transitive verb 倒 = pour: 倒茶 (*dao2 cha2* = pour~tea), 倒糞 (*dao3 fen4* = pour-away~faeces = clear night-soil tubs).

Adverb 倒 = reverse: Eve's 倒數 (*dao3 shu4* = reverse~count = count-down), GDP's 倒退 (*dao3 tui4* = reverse~retreat = shrink).

Scalpers 倒賣 (*dao3 mai4* = reverse~sell = re-sell for profit).

Uncompromised, negotiations 拉倒 (*la1 dao3* = pull-down = break down).

Bankrupt families/institutions 樹倒猢猻散 (*shu4 dao3 hu2 sun1 san4* = tree~falls~mon-keys~disperse = collapse/disintegrate, lose all supporters/dependents).

by Diana Yue