

# 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 studying and exams

考

Putonghua pronunciation: *kao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haau3*

Meanings: test, examination

考 = ponder/examine/check. Scientists 考證 (*kao3 zheng4* = test~prove = examine) hypothesis. Police 考察 (*kao3 cha4* = examine~observe = study) crime scene. CEO 考慮 (*kao3 lü4* = test~worry = consider) proposals. Archaeologists 考古 (*kao2 gu3* = examine~antiquity = study archaeological sites/relics). Students attend 考試 (*kao3 shi4* = test~try = tests/exams): 小考 (*xiao3 kao3* = small~exam = tests), 大考 (*da4 kao3* = big~exam = examinations). Job applicants attend 面試 (*mian4 shi4* = face~exam = interviews).

Examiners read 考卷 (*kao3 juan4* = test/exam~scrolls/scripts), assess student's performance: 優 (*you1*, excellent), 良 (*liang2*, good), 常 (*chang2*, average), 可 (*ke3*, OK/passable), 劣 (*lie4*, bad/poor), decide 及格 (*ji2 ge2* = reach~status = pass) or 不及格 (*bu4 ji2 ge2* = not~reach~status = fail).

by Diana Yue