

# 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 divorce

離

Putonghua pronunciation: *li2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lei4*

Meanings: leave, depart, separate, desert, abandon

離 = 離開 (*li2 kai1* = leaves/goes-away), 離別 (*li2 bie2* = leave-departure). Visitor 離去 (*li2 qu4* = leaves-is-gone), traveler 離家 (*li2 jia1* = leaves-home), graduate 離校 (*li2 xiao4* = leaves-school), retiree 離職 (*li2 zhi2* = leaves-post).

Enemy 離間 (*li2 jian4* = separate-block-off = sew bad feelings between) friends, then 離棄 (*li2 qi4* = abandons-deserts) them. 貌合神離 (*mao4 he2 shen2 li2* = appearance-unite-spirit-separate) describes couple staying together despite lack of mutual interest/care.

In old China men could 休妻 (*xiu1 qi1* = rest/stop-wife = annul wife). Today, couple undergoing 離婚 (*li2 hun1* = separate-marriage = divorce) must 分居 (*fen1 ju1* = separately-reside = live apart), settle 贍養費 (*shan4 yang3 fei4* = supply-support-fees = alimony).

by Diana Yue