

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 好

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 bio-chemical weapons

生

Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saang1*

Meanings: life, live, living, give birth to, beget, biology, biological

生 = 生命 (*sheng1 ming4* = born-life = life). Pregnant woman 生產 (*sheng1 chan3* = beget-produce = gives birth), baby 誕生 (*dan4 sheng1* = born-life = is born). Factories 生產 (*sheng1 chan3* = yield-produce) goods.

生物 (*sheng1 wu4* = living-things/organism = plants/animals), 微生物 (*wei1 sheng1 wu4* = micro-organisms) 生長 (*sheng1 zhang3* = born-grow = grow). 生物學 (*sheng1 wu4 xue2* = living-things-study) = biology. 生物鐘 (*sheng1 wu4 zhong1* = biological-clock)'s ticking affects men/women's fertility.

生物武器 (*sheng1 wu4 wu3 qi4* = biological-military- instruments = organic/biological weapons) cause 生靈塗炭 (*sheng1 ling2 tu2 tan4* = lives-souls-mud/mire- coals/fire = massive killings/devastation of lives/environment). Survivors 死裡逃生 (*si3 li3 tao2 sheng1* = death-inside-escape-life = barely escape death).

by Diana Yue