

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 pretty women

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiú2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kau4*

Meaning: request, seek, search, ask for favor, beg, beseech, need, demand

求 = 請求 (*qǐng3 qiú2* = request-ask), 哀求 (*āi1 qiú2* = sorrowfully/desperately-beg), 需求 (*xū1 qiú2* = need-demand). Students 求學 (*qiú2 xūe2* = pursue-studies), 求職 (*qiú2 zhí2* = seek-employment/jobs). Patients 求醫 (*qiú2 yī1* = seek-medical-treatment). Titanic 求救 (*qiú2 jiú4* = asks-for-help, sends SOS). Detectives 求証 (*qiú2 zhèng4* = look-for-evidence). Many pretty girls 求名求利 (*qiú2 míng2 qiú2 lì4* = seek-fame-seek-fortune), so starlets 供過於求 (*gòng1 guo4 yú1 qiú2* = supply-exceeds-demand).

Bachelor 求偶 (*qiú2 ǒu3* = looks-for-partner/spouse), 求愛 (*qiú2 ài4* = beg-love = woos) girl, 求歡 (*qiú2 huān1* = beg-pleasure = asks for sex), 求婚 (*qiú2 hūn1* = beg-marry = proposes): “求你嫁給我!” (*qiú2 nǐ3 jià4 gei2 wǒ3* = beg-you-marry-to-me!)

by Diana Yue