

# 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 washing



Putonghua pronunciation: *jing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeng6*

Meanings: clean

淨 = clean/pure: 淨水 (*jing4 shui3* = pure~water), 淨肉 (*jing4 rou4* = pure~meat without bones), 淨利 (*jing4 li4* = pure/net~gain). Clothes/dishes 洗淨 (*xi3 jing4* = washed clean) are 乾淨 (*gan1 jing4* = dry~clean = clean). 乾淨利落 (*gan1 jing4 li4 luo4* = dry~clean~smooth~drop) describes musician/executive's clean/faultless performance.

淨 has euphemistic meaning: 淨手 (*jing4 shou3* = clean~hands = peeing), 淨身 (*jing4 shen1* = clean~body = eunuch's castration). 不乾淨 (*bu4 gan1 jing4* = not~dry~clean = unclean/dirty) also means haunted by ghosts.

Taoism preaches 清淨無為 (*qing1 jing4 wu2 wei2* = pure~clean~no~action = undisturbed meditation, non-action). Buddhist term 西方淨土 (*xi1 fang1 jing4 tu3* = west~direction~clean~earth) = the Pure Land of the West, where reincarnated souls go.