

# 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 auctions

藏

Putonghua pronunciation: verb *cang2*, noun *zang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chong4, jong6*

Meanings: store, keep, hide, collection

藏 = hide/keep: 隱藏 (*yin3 cang2* = conceal-hide), 藏書 (*cang2 shu1* = gathered-books = library collection), 寶藏 (*bao3 zang4* = treasure-collection = treasure). 藏身之處 (*cang2 shen1 zhi1 chu4* = hide-body-'s-place) = person's hiding place.

Auctions attract 臥虎藏龍 (*wo4 hu3 cang2 long2* = lying-tigers-hiding-dragons = heroes/connoisseurs keeping low profile). 收藏家 (*shou1 cang2 jia1* = gather-keep-master = collector) knows auctioned item's 收藏史 (*shou1 cang2 shi3* = gather-keep-history = provenance): 家藏 (*jia1 cang2* = family-keep = heirloom), 館藏 (*guan3 cang2* = house/museum-collection), 御藏 (*yü4 cang2* = imperial-collection). 精藏 (*jing1 cang2* = fine-collect) = collection's fine items.

Mysterious buyer 深藏不露 (*shen1 cang2 bu4 lu4* = deep-hide-no-reveal = doesn't speak his mind, is unfathomable).