

# 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 the Foolish Old Man



Putonghua pronunciation: *shan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saan1*

Meanings: mountain

Character 山 (resembling three peaks/humps) is also radical for words associated with mountain: 峰 (*feng1*, peak), 嶺 (*ling3*, range), 崖 (*ya2*, cliff), 坡 (*po1*, slope), 峻 (*jun4*, hilly/steep). 山路 (*shan1 lu4* = mountain~roads/paths) cut through 大山 (*da4 shan1* = big-mountains), 小丘 (*xiao3 qiu1* = small-hills/mounds). 山河 (*shan1 he2* = mountains~rivers) = country's terrain/territory. 爬山者 (*pa2 shan1 zhe3* = climb~mountain~person = mountaineer) dreams of conquering 雪山 (*xue3 shan1* = snow-capped~mountain/peak). Painters visit 名山大川 (*ming2 shan1 da4 chuan1* = famous~mountains~big-rivers), paint 山水畫 (*shan1 shui3 hua4* = mountain~water~picture = landscapes). 高山仰止 (*gao1 shan1 yang2 zhi3* = high~mountain~look-up~stop) describes awe-inspiring figure, e.g. hero, thinker. 出山 (*chu1 shan1* = exit/leave~mountain) describes retiree re-entering profession to demonstrate talent/authority.

by Diana Yue