

# 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 old family money

承

Putonghua pronunciation: *cheng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing4*

Meanings: receive, accept, admit, shoulder, bear, adopt, inherit

承 means receive/hold something from above. Beams 承受 (*cheng2 shou4* = receive~accept = bear/support) weight of roof. Wrongdoer 承認 (*cheng2 ren4* = accepts~admits) fault, 承擔 (*cheng2 dan1* = accepts/shoulders) responsibility. 承辦商 (*cheng2 ban4 shang1* = accept~handle~merchant) = contractor.

Newly-weds 承諾 (*cheng2 huo4* = accept~promise = promise) fidelity. 膝下承歡 (*xi1 xia4 cheng2 huan1* = knees~below~receive/support~joy) describes children clustered around loving parents' knees. Son 繼承 (*ji4 cheng2* = next~adopt = inherits/ succeeds to) father's fortune.

In culture/learning, 傳承 (*chuan2 cheng2* = pass-on~accept = continuation/tradition) is respected. 一脈相承 (*yi1 mai4 xiang1 cheng2* = one~pulse/vein~mutual~adopt) describes trait/ideology inherited by like-minded generations. Great scholars 承先啟後 (*cheng2 xian1 qi3 hou4* = adopt~previous~open~later = continue predecessors' work, enlighten later generations).

by Diana Yue