

# 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 stupid search

Putonghua pronunciation: *chun3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chun2*

Meanings: stupid, dumb

Pictogram 蠢 shows 春 (*chun1*, spring) over two 虫 (= 蟲 *chong2*, bugs/worms). 蠢動 (*chun3 dong4* = dumb~move) describes bugs stirring in springtime. 蠢蠢欲動 (*chun3 chun3 yu4 dong4* = dumb~dumb~desire~move/act) describes restless/ambitious factions stirring/contemplating to act.

Fools are 愚蠢 (*yu2 chun3* = slow-witted-dumb). Boss shouts at employee: “蠢才!” (*chun3 cai2* = stupid~talent = “You dumb bloke!”) 蠢驢 (*chun3 lu2* = dumb~ass), 蠢豬 (*chun3 zhu1* = dumb~pig), 蠢貨 (*chun3 huo4* = dumb~commodity) all mean “Stupid!”

蠢人 (*chun3 ren2* = stupid~people) often do 蠢事 (*chun3 shi4* = stupid~things). Cantonese cheeky saying 人蠢無藥醫 (*ren2 chun2 wu2 yao4 yi1* = person~stupid~no~medicine~cure) means there's no way you can enlighten a stupid guy and make him improve.

by Diana Yue