

# 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 Chief Executive Election



Putonghua pronunciation: *dou4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dau3*

Meanings: compete, fight, struggle against, persecute

Ideogram 鬥 (left-right opposing axes) indicates antagonism: 鬥嘴 (*dou4 zui3* = fight~mouth = argue/quarrel), 鬥快 (*dou4 kuai4* = fight~fast = see who's faster), 戰鬥 (*zhan4 dou4* = war~compete = battle), 決鬥 (*jue2 dou4* = determined/decisive~fight = duel). Marxists' 階級鬥爭 (*jie1 ji2 dou4 zheng1* = platform~tier~compete~fight) = class struggle.

鬥牛勇士 (*dou4 niu2 yong3 shi4* = fight~cow/bull~brave~man) = bullfighter/matador. 鬥敗的公雞 (*dou4 bai4 de0 gong1 ji1* = fight~defeated~'s~male~chicken = defeated cock) describes loser's depressed look.

HKSAR's Chief Executive election was 龍爭虎鬥 (*long2 zheng1 hu3 dou4* = dragons~compete~tigers~fight = battle of strong guys). Candidates 鬥智 (*dou4 zhi4* = compete~intelligence = fought with brains), 鬥狠 (*dou4 hen3* = compete~fierce = fought to see who's fiercer/nastier).

by Diana Yue