

# 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 graduation

Putonghua pronunciation: *lao2*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *lo4*  
Meanings: toil, labor, tired

勞 (two火 *huo3*, fire + 力 *li4*, strength), means 勞動 (*lao2 dong4* = labor-move = work/labor). Housewives 操勞 (*cao1 lao2* = handle-labor = toil) everyday. Lazybones fancy 不勞而獲 (*bu4 lao2 er2 huo4* = no-work-and/but-gain).

體力勞動 (*ti3 li4 lao2 dong4* = body-strength-labor-move) = manual work. 勞動節 (*lao2 dong4 jie2* = labor-move-festival = Labor Day, 1st May) honors 勞工階級 (*lao2 gong1 jie1 ji2* = labor-work-steps-class = labor class). 勞資談判 (*lao2 zi1 tan2 pan4* = labor-capital-talk-adjudicate) = employer and employees hold negotiations.

勤勞 (*qin2 lao2* = diligent-hardworking) students may 過勞 (*guo4 lao2* = over-labor = get overworked/tired). Air-planes fear 金屬疲勞 (*jin1 shu3 pi2 lao2* = gold-kind-tired-labor = metal fatigue).