

# 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 face

(radical 目 *mu4* = eye)

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngaan5*

Meanings: eye

We use 眼睛 (*yan3 jing1*, eye~pupil = eyes) to 觀看 (*guan1 kan4* = watch~see = see) things. 瞎 (*xia1*) = 盲 (*mang2*) = blind. 色盲 (*se1 mang2* = color~blind) people have poor 視力 (*shi4 li4* = see~strength = eyesight). 近視 (*jin4 shi4* = near~eyesight = near-sighted/myopic) people wear 眼鏡 (*yan3 jing4* = eye~mirror = eye-glasses). 失明 (*shi1 ming2* = lost~brightness/eyesight = blind) people use 盲字 (*mang2 zi4* = blind~words = braille).

Poetically-speaking, eyes are 靈魂之窗 (*ling2 hun2 zhi1 chuang1* = soul~spirit~'s~window, vivifying/animating person's face/expression).

Husband-picking/art-collecting requires 眼光 (*yan3 guang1* = eye~light = taste/judgment). 瞎了眼 (*xia2 le0 yan3* = blind~ed-eye = 有眼無珠 *you2 yan3 wu2 zhu1* = has~eye~no~pupil) describes people making friends/choices blindly/irrationally.

by Diana Yue