

# 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 heat waves



Putonghua pronunciation: *re4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yit6*

Meanings: hot, heat

冷熱 (*leng3 re4* = cold-hot) = temperature range. Nurse 探熱 (*tan4 re4* = probe-heat = takes invalid's body temperature). Volunteers have 熱情 (*re4 qing2* = hot~feeling = passion), 熱心 (*re4 xin1* = hot~heart = zeal/concern).

熱天 (*re4 tian1* = hot~sky) = hot weather/days. Fat people 怕熱 (*pa4 re4* = fear-hot = dislike/cannot stand hot places), stay in 冷氣間 (*leng3 qi4 jian1* = cold~air/gas~space = air-conditioned areas) when 熱浪 (*re4 lang4* = hot~wave = heat wave) rages.

Romeo 熱戀 (*re4 lian4* = hot~love = passionately loves) Juliet. 熱辣辣 (*re4 la4 la4* = hot~spicy-hot~spicy-hot) describes sizzling/spicy-hot food, sexy girls, hot topics. Economists warn: “樓市過熱!” (*lou2 shi4 guo4 re4* = building~market~over-hot = “Property market's overheated!”)

by Diana Yue