

# 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 acting

演

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yin2*

Meanings: evolve, develop, extend, deduce, practice, act, perform

演 (radical 彳 = 水 *shui3*, water) originally means water's undercurrent that flows/changes. Things/situations 演變 (*yan3 bian4* = move/evolve~change). 演繹 (*yan3 yi4* = develop/extend~interpret) = deduction, 歸納 (*gui1 na4* = return~collect/contain) = induction. Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* has Chinese translation with title “天演論” (*Tian1 Yan3 Lun4* = heaven/nature~evolution~thesis).

Academy of Performing Arts teaches 演奏 (*yan3 zou4* = perform~play~instrument), 演唱 (*yan3 chang4* = perform~sing), 演技 (*yan3 ji4* = acting~skills). 演員 (*yan3 yuan2* = act/perform~ member = actors/artistes) 演出 (*yan3 chu1* = perform~out = perform). 表演 (*biao3 yan3* = show~perform) = demonstration/show.

VIPs 演講 (*yan3 jiang3* = perform~talk/speech = make speeches). Bully states stage 軍事演習 (*jun1 shi4 yan3 xi2* = military~things~interpret/perform~practice = military exercises).