

# 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 bridges

樑

Putonghua pronunciation: *liang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *leung4*

Meanings: girder, roof beam, arch-shaped object, ridge

樑 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = roof beam: 主樑 (*zhu3 liang2* = main-beam/girder), 橫樑 (*heng2 liang2* = horizontal~beam). 橋樑 (*qiao2 liang2* = bridge~beam) = bridge. 樑上君子 (*liang2 shang jun1 zi0* = beam-on-honorable~man = gentleman crouching under the roof-beam) means thief.

國之棟樑 (*guo2 zhi1 dong4 liang2* = state~'s~column-girder) = minister/hero upholding government. 偷樑換柱 (*tou1 liang2 huan4 zhu4* = steal~beam~change~column) = stealthily altering original plan. 上樑不正下樑歪 (*shang4 liang2 bu4 zheng4 xia4 liang2 wai1* = upper-beam~not~straight/correct-lower-beam~incorrect) = bad/immoral superior will make subordinates follow suit.

樑 also means ridge: 高鼻樑 (*gao1 bi2 liang2* = high~nose~ridge = tall nose), 挺起脊樑 (*ting2 qi3 zhi4 liang2* = straighten-up~back/spine) = brace oneself up.

by Diana Yue