

# 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 dental care

補

Putonghua pronunciation: *bu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bo2*

Meanings: mend, refill, supplement

補 (radical 衤 = 衣 *yi1*, clothes) means mend/supplement: 補衣 (*bu3 yi1* = mends~clothes), 補鞋 (*bu3 xie2* = mends/repairs~shoes), 補襪子 (*bu3 wa1 zi0* = mend~socks~diminutive). Housewife works to 幫補家計 (*bang1 bu3 jia1 ji4* = help~ supplement~home~plan = earn more to pay for home expenses), awaits husband's 補薪 (*bu3 xin1* = replenish~salary = back-pay). Booster-drinks 補充 (*bu3 chong1* = refill~fill = replenish) energy. Small business seeks 補助 (*bu3 zhu4* = supplement~help = grant/aid). Bank 補償 (*bu3 chang2* = mend~repay = makes amends to) mishandled clients. 取長補短 (*qu3 chang2 bu3 duan3* = take~long~supplement~short) means learning from others' strengths to improve one's own shortcomings. Dentist examines bad teeth, advises 補牙 (*bu3 ya2* = mend~teeth = putting in fillings).