

# 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 willow trees

枝

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji1*

Meanings: branch, twig, stem

枝 (木 *mu4*, tree/wood + 支 *zhi1*, branch/tributary) = 樹枝 (*shu4 zhi1* = tree's~branch), 枝葉 (*zhi1 ye4* = branches~foliage), 接枝 (*jie2 zhi1* = join~branch = grafting/graftage). 花枝招展 (*hua1 zhi1 zha0 zhan3* = flowers~branches~waving~flaunting) describes dressy woman. Married son 開枝散葉 (*kai1 zhi1 san4 ye4* = spread~branch~flare~leaves = begets offspring).

粗枝大葉 (*cu4 zhi1 da4 ye4* = bulky~branches~big~leaves) describes rough/unrefined person/style. 橫生枝節 (*heng2 sheng1 zhi1 jie2* = sideways~grow~branch~section) = minor issues causing complications. 蟬過別枝 (*chan2 gu4 bie2 zhi1* = cicada~crosses-over-to~another~branch) means changing to another job/master.

柳絲 (*liu3 si1* = willow~silk~threads) means fine/long/flexible 柳條 (*liu3 tiao2* = willow~twigs = osier/wicker), material for 柳編 (*liu3 bian1* = willow~weave = wickerwork, e.g. wicker-baskets).