

# Character Builder

# 您好嗎? 呀

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 wedding day

吉

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji2*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *gat1*  
Meaning: luck, lucky, good, auspicious

吉 (showing weapon lying on weapon-holder) suggests ceasefire/peace, i.e. 吉利 (*ji1 li4* = lucky-beneficial). Magpies' song is 吉兆 (*ji2 zhao4* = lucky-omen). 吉人天相 (*ji2 ren2 tian1 xiang4* = good/blessed-person-heaven-protect) describes lucky person who can always 趨吉避凶 (*qu1 ji2 bi4 xiong1* = approach-fortune-avoid-misfortune = capture lucky spells, avoid unlucky events). Classic poetry lines “有女懷春·吉士誘之” (*you3 nu3 huai3 chun1, ji2 shi4 you3 zhi1* = there-is-girl-bosom-holding-spring, good-man-lures-her) describes willing girl being wooed/seduced by becoming/romantic lad.

吉 is part of character 喜 (*xi3, joy*). Couple picks 良辰吉日 (*liang2 chen2 ji2 ri4* = good-hour-auspicious-date = auspicious day in calendar) for 辦喜事 (*ban4 xi3 shi4* = arrange-joyous-event = holding wedding).

by Diana Yue