

Character Builder 您好學? 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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 hospitalization

Putonghua pronunciation: *wen4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *man6*

Meaning: ask, inquire, request, question

問 (radical 門 *men2*, door) = ask/question/request: 問好 (*wen4 hao3* = ask-good/well = say hi), 發問 (*fa1 wen4* = raise-questions), 問要錢 (*wen4 yao4 qian2* = ask-for-money), 問道於盲 (*wen4 dao4 yü1 mang2* = ask-road/direction-of/from-blind-man) = ask fool for advice.

答問 (*da2 wen4* = question-answer) = Q&A/quiz. 問題 (*wen4 ti2* = ask-title) = question/problem. Reporters 訪問 (*fang3 wen4* = visit-question = interview) 有問題 (*you3 wen4 ti2* = has-question/problem = questionable/problematic/suspected) businesses, 問長問短 (*wen4 chang2 wen4 duan3* = ask-long-ask-short = fire lengthy/trite/annoying questions).

Visitor 慰問 (*wei4 wen4* = console-ask = consoles) patient, 噓寒問暖 (*xu1 han2 wen4 nuan3* = blow-air-cold-ask-warm = shows intimate care/attention), brings friends' 問候 (*wen4 hou4* = ask-wait-upon = regards/condolences).

by Diana Yue