

# 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:

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 counting your blessings

數

Putonghua pronunciation: *shu3, shu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *so2, so3*

Meaning: count, calculate, number, several, mathematics

數 (radical 攴 *wen2*, script/writing) means 數字 (*shu4 zi4* = numerical-figure), 數目 (*shu4 mu4* = number-quantity): 奇數 (*qi2 shu4* = odd-number), 偶數 (*ou3 shu4* = pair/even-number). 數算 (*shu3 shuan4* = count-calculate): 從一數到十 (*cong2 yi1 shu3 dao4 shi2* = from-one-count-to-ten), 數人數 (*shu3 ren2 shu4* = count-person-number = do head-count).

數學 (*shu4 xue2* = numbers-studies) = mathematics. 數據庫 (*shu4 ju4 ku4* = calculation-evidence-tank) = database.

Ancient Indian expression 恆河沙數 (*Heng2 He2 sha1 shu4* = Ganges-River-sand-number) means infinite numbers.

命數 (*ming4 shu4* = life-numbers) = fate/destiny. Losers have 數以百計 (*shu4 yi3 bai3 ji4* = number-by-hundred-count = hundreds of) new chances, shouldn't 數落 (*shu3 luo4* = count-down = reproach/blame) competitors/system.