

# 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 doors

對

Putonghua pronunciation: *dui4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dui3*

Meanings: pair, twos, couple, facing

對 = 雙 (*shuang4*, couple/pair): 對稱 (*dui4 cheng4* = pair~balance = symmetrical), 一雙筷子 (*yi4 shuang1 kuai4 zi0* = a~pair~chopsticks), 一對門 (*yi4 dui4 men2* = a~pair~doors with left-right panels). 門神 (*men2 shen2* = door~gods' pictures) decorate door-panels. 對聯 (*dui4 lian2* = pair~link = vertically-hung descriptive couplets) decorate door's left-and-right.

Singles seek 對象 (*dui4 xiang4* = pair/face~image = object to woo/marry). 一對璧人 (*yi4 dui4 bi3 ren2* = one~pair~jade~person) describes well-matched wedding couple.

對面 (*dui4 mian4* = opposite~face) = opposite/facing. 對方 (*dui4 fang1* = opposite~direction) = other~side/party. In negotiations, 對手 (*dui4 shou3* = opposite~hand = rival parties) should 對話 (*dui4 hua4* = face/interact~talk = dialogue), not 對罵 (*dui4 ma4* = face/interact~rebuken = bad-mouth each other).