

# 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 about orchestras

(radical 弓 *gong1* = bow)

Putonghua pronunciation: *xian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yin4*

Meanings: string, stringed instrument

弦 = string on archer's 弓 (*gong1*, bow) or 弦樂器 (*xian2 yue4 qi4* = stringed~musical~instruments): 提琴 (*ti2 qin2* = hand-held~lyre = instruments of the violin family), 吉他 (*ji1 ta1* = “guitar”-transliterated). 琴弦 (*qin2 xian2* = lyre~strings = strings) need 調校 (*tiao2 jiao4* = adjust~correct = tuning). 胡琴 (*hu2 qin2* = Hu/Western-District~lyre = huqin, Chinese violin) player strikes strings with 琴弓 (*qin2 gong1* = lyre~bow = bow) to produce sounds. 琵琶 (*pi2 pa2* = pipa, Chinese lute) player 挑弦 (*tiao1 xian2* = plucks~strings), 撥弦 (*bo2 xian2* = strums~strings).

Friends who 不咬弦 (*bu4 yao3 xian2* = not-bite~strings) cannot get along. 弦外之音 (*xian2 wai4 zhi1 yin1* = strings~beyond~s~sound/notes) means what an explicit message delicately hints at.

by Diana Yue