

# 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 acting



Putonghua pronunciation: *nian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *nim6*

Meanings: pronounce, recite

唸 (口 *kou3*, mouth + 念 *nan4*, idea/remember/memorize) means say/pronounce/recite. Kids learn to 唸字 (*nian4 zi4* = pronounce~words). 唸書 (*nan4 shu1* = recite~books) = 讀書 (*du2 shu1* = read~books) = study. 唸大學 (*nian4 da4 xue2* = study~big~learning = attend university/college. Traditional Chinese education stresses 死唸書 (*si3 nian4 shu1* = dead~recite~books = dumbly memorizing books = rote-learning).

Drama/movie scripts contain 對白 (*dui4 bai2* = facing/echoing~plain/colloquial = dialogue). Shakespearean actors excel in 唸白 (*nian4 bai2* = reciting/delivering~dialogue/lines), 唸詩 (*nan4 shi1* = reciting/delivering~poetry).

Monk/nun 唸經 (*nian4 jing1* = recite~sutras/scriptures/prayers), fingering 唸珠 (*nian4 zhu1* = reciting~beads = rosary).

Magicians 唸咒 (*nian4 zhou4* = utter/chant~spells/curses). 唸唸有詞 (*nan4 nan4 you3 ci2* = utter~utter~has~words) describes person mumbling something inaudibly.