

# 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 winter clothes

Putonghua pronunciation: *mao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo4*

Meanings: hair, fur, feather, wool

毛 = 體毛 (*ti3 mao2* = body~hair): tiger's 皮毛 (*pi2 mao2* = skin-hair = fur), eagle's 羽毛 (*yü3 mao2* = feather-hair = feathers), singular 一根羽毛 (*yi1 gen1 yü3 mao2* = one~quantifier~hair = a feather). 長毛象 (*chang2 mao2 xiang4* = long-hair~elephant) = mammoth. 毛筆 (*mao2 bi3* = hair~pen) = Chinese-style writing/painting-brush.

毛 also means wool-like/superficial. 毛巾 (*mao2 jin1* = woolly-kerchief) = towel. 毛利 (*mao2 li4* = surface~profit) = gross profit. 毛病 (*mao2 bing* = surface~illness) = fault/blemish. 吹毛求疵 (*cui1 mao2 qiu2 ci1* = blow~fur/feathers~for~blemish) = excessively fault-finding.

羊毛 (*yang2 mao2* = sheep's~wool) is woven into 毛線 (*mao2 xian4* = woolen-threads/yarn), 毛衣 (*mao2 yi1* = woolen-clothes), 毛氈 (*mao2 tan3* = woolen-blankets).