

# 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 Chief Executive Election

Putonghua pronunciation: *gang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gong1*

Meanings: essential part, outline

綱 (radical 纟 mi4, string/thread) originally means fishing net's main rope on which hang net's 目 (*mu4*, eyes), hence 綱舉目張 (*gang1 ju3 mu4 zhang1* = main-rope~raised~eyes~opened) describes plan's correct steering: with main principle upheld, smaller parts can't go wrong.

綱 now means essential part/outline. Writer sketches book's 大綱 (*da4 gang1* = big/main~outline). CEO explains project's 綱領 (*gang1 ling3* = outline~lead = leading principles). 夫綱不振 (*fu1 gang1 bu4 zhen4* = husband's~principles~not~strengthened) describes weak, hen-pecked husband.

Chief Executive election candidates Henry Tang (nicknamed 豬 *zhu1*, pig) and C. Y. Leung (nicknamed 狼 *lang2*, wolf) debated on their 政綱 (*zheng4 gang1* = political~principles = political programs). Smearing and accusations 無限上綱 (*wu2 xian4 shang4 gang1* = no~limit~raise~principle = had no ceiling).

by Diana Yue