

# 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 bridges

跨

Putonghua pronunciation: *kua4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kwa3*

Meanings: take big strides, straddle, ride, go across

Ideogram 跨 (足 *zhu1*, foot + 夸 *kua1*, empty) indicates two legs standing apart, leaving space under crotch. 跨開大步 (*kua1 kai1 da4 bu4* = stride~open~big~steps) = taking big strides forward. 跨越 (*kua1 yue2* = stride~pass) = pass, overtake. 跨過門坎 (*kua1 guo4 men2 kan3* = stride/cross~over~door's~floor~bar) means successfully meet/surpass requirements.

Rider 跨上馬背 (*kua1 shang4 ma3 bei4* = stride~on~to~horse~back = mounts horse). Athlete 跨欄 (*kua1 lan2* = cross~over~fence = jumps hurdles). Government launches 跨部門 (*kua1 bu4 men2* = striding~ministry~door = interdepartmental) project. 跨國企業 (*kua1 guo2 qi3 ye4* = striding~countries~stranding~industry) = multinational enterprise.

金門橋 (*jin1 men2 qiao2* = Golden~Gate~Bridge) 橫跨 (*heng2 kua1* = across~stride = strides over) mouth of San Francisco Bay.

by Diana Yue