

# 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 the face



Putonghua pronunciation: *kou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hau2*

Meanings: mouth, opening

We use 口 (= 嘴巴 *zui3 ba1* = mouth-opening = mouth) to 吃 (*chi1* = eat), 說話 (*shuo1 hua4* = say~words = speak/talk). 啞巴 (*ya3 ba1* = mute-opening/mouth = mute people) use 手語 (*shou2 yu3* = hand-language = sign language). 口吃 (*kou3 chi4* = mouth-eat) = stutter/stammer. 口臭 (*kou3 chou4* = mouth-stink) means bad breath.

Oldsters tell 口述歷史 (*kou3 shu4 li4 shi3* = mouth~narrate~experience~history = oral history). Protestors yell 口號 (*kou3 hao4* = mouth~order = slogans). 口頭協議 (*kou3 tou2 xie2 yi3* = mouth~head/on~together~agree = oral/verbal agreements) precede written contracts.

一家四口 (*yi1 jia1 si4 kou3* = one~family~four~mouths = family of four) earning \$5,000/month can hardly 糊口 (*hu2 kou3* = paste~mouth = fill mouths/stomachs).