

# 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

通

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung1*

Meanings: through, lead to, link, go to

通 (radical 辶 = 舟 *zhou1*, boat) means going through/to. 通道 (*tong1 dao4* = through~route) = thoroughfare/passageway. 開通 (*kai1 tong1* = open-through) person is 通達 (*tong1 da2* = through-reach = uninhibited/understanding). 融會貫通 (*rong2 hui4 guan4 tong1* = melt-merge~penetrate~through) means thoroughly understanding linkage/relationship between separate points/disciplines.

橋樑 (*qiao2 liang2* = bridge~beam = bridges) let cars/trains/trucks 通過 (*tong1 guo4* = pass~through), facilitate regions' 通商 (*tong1 shang1* = through~commerce = trading). 青馬大橋 (*Qing1 Ma3 da4 qiao2* = Tsing-Yi-Ma-Wan-big~bridge = Tsing Ma Bridge) 通往 (*tong1 wang3* = goes-to) the Hongkong International Airport.

Spies 通風報訊 (*tong1 feng1 bao4 xun4* = pass~wind~report~message = supply/pass on information). 中國通 (*zhong1 guo2 tong1* = China~know-through) = China hand = sinophile.

by Diana Yue