

# 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



Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meanings: work, craft, engineering, clever, fine, sophisticated

Pictogram 工, depicting carpentry tool, means work: 工作 (*gong1 zuo2* = work~do = work), 工廠 (*gong1 chang3* = work~factory), 工業 (*gong1 ye4* = work/craft~profession = industry). Chinese address 工程師 (*gong1 cheng2 shi1* = work~process~master = engineers) as “工”: 胡工 (*Hu2 gong1* = Mr Hu, engineer).

水利工程 (*shui3 li4 gong1 cheng2* = water~benefit-engineer~process = irrigation projects) include 壩 (*ba4*, dams), 橋 (*qiao2*, bridges), 人工湖 (*ren2 gong1 hu2* = human~work~lake = artificial lakes). 工人 (*gong1 ren2* = work~person = workers) have started 施工 (*shi1 gong1* = apply~work = doing construction) on 港珠澳大橋 (*Gang3 Zhu1Ao4 da4 qiao2* = Hongkong~Zhuhai~Macau~Bridge).

鬼斧神工 (*gui3 fu3 shen2 gong1* = ghost's~axe~god's~craft) describes superhuman/stunning craftsmanship/technology.

by Diana Yue