

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 dress codes

便

Putonghua pronunciation: *bian4, pian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bin6*

Meaning: convenient, informal, casual, ease, expedient

便 (radical 亻 = 人 *ren2*, person) = convenient/casual. 便利店 (*bian4 li4 dian4* = convenient-beneficial-shop = convenient stores) 便宜 (*pian2 yi2* = easy-cheap = cheap) things: 方便麵 (*fang1 bian4 mian4* = just-convenient/expedient-noodles = instant noodles), 便當 (*bian4 dang4* = easy-done = bento), MTR makes commuting 便捷 (*bian4 jie2* = convenient-win = convenient). Truck-driver 與人方便 (*yü3 ren2 fang1 bian4* = give-person-convenience = offers help), lets hiker 搭便車 (*da1 bian4 che1* = ride-convenient-car = hitch a ride).

Host: “Come for 便飯 (*bian4 fan4* = convenient/casual-rice/meal = casual lunch/dinner). Wear 便服 (*bian4 fu2* = casual-attire/clothes), 休閒服 (*xiu1 xian2 fu2* = vacation-leisure-clothes), 運動服 (*yün4 dong4 fu2* = sports-wear), 便鞋 (*bian4 xie2* = casual-shoes).”

by Diana Yue