

# 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 wheat-planting



Putonghua pronunciation: *tu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to2*

Meanings: earth, soil, land

土 = stretch/area of land. Patriots defend 國土 (*guo2 tu3* = state-land = country's territory). Landlords own 土地 (*tu3 di4* = earth-land). 土 = native/rustic/indigenous: 土法 (*tu3 fa3* = native-method) healing, 土氣 (*tu3 qi4* = rustic-air = rustic) mannerisms.

土 = earth/soil: 肥土 (*fei2 tu3* = fat/rich-soil), 土牆 (*tu3 qiang2* = mud-wall). Seeds germinate in 泥土 (*ni2 tu3* = soil-earth). Northwestern China's 黃土高原 (*huang2 tu3 gao1 yuan2* = yellow-soil-high-plain = loess plateau) has serious 土壤侵蝕 (*tu3 rang3 qin1 shi2* = soil-earth-invade-corrode = soil erosion). Dead things return to 塵土 (*chen2 tu3* = dust-soil/earth).

Japan covets China's 稀土 (*xi1 tu3* = rare-earth). 寸金尺土 (*cun4 jin1 chi3 tu3* = inch-gold-foot-land) describes exorbitantly-priced apartments.