

# 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 Hurricane Sandy

缺

Putonghua pronunciation: *qüe1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kuet3*

Meanings: missing, lacking, broken, chipped, deficient

缺 (radical 缶 *fou3*, pot) describes chipped/imperfect utensil. 月圓月缺 (*yue4 yüan2 yue4 que1* = moon-round-moon~incomplete) = moon's wax and wane. 缺點 (*qüe1 dian3* = lack~point) = weakness/ flaw/deficiency. Members 缺席 (*qüe1 xi2* = miss~seat = skip meeting) because agenda 缺少 (*qüe1 shao3* = miss~lack = lacks) attraction. Tourists in Tibet often 缺氧 (*qüe1 yang3* = lack~oxygen = suffer hypoxia).

空缺 (*kong1 que1* = empty-lack) = job opening/vacancy. Greedy want 肥缺 (*fei2 que1* = fat/lucrative~opening). 衣食無缺 (*yi1 shi2 wu2 que1* = clothes~food~no~lack = getting adequately clothed and fed) is poor man's dream.

Hurricane-stricken areas 缺水 (*qüe1 shui3* = lack~water), 缺電 (*qüe1 dian4* = lack~electricity), 缺藥 (*qüe1 yao4* = lack~medicine). Relief-teams 缺錢 (*qüe1 qian2* = lack~money/funding).

by Diana Yue