

# 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 tigers

猛

Putonghua pronunciation: *meng3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *maang5*

Meanings: fierce, strong, stunning

猛 = 兇猛 (*xiong1 meng3* = fierce~ferocious). 猛虎 (*meng2 hu3* = fierce-tigers) are 猛獸 (*meng3 shou4* = fierce-beasts). 勇猛 (*yong2 meng3* = brave~fierce) describes fighters/pugilists/athletes. 猛將如雲 (*meng3 jiang4 ru2 yun2* = fierce-generals-resemble-clouds) describes strong army with outstanding leaders/fighters or all-star casts/teams.

猛烈 (*meng3 lie4* = stunning~fierce) describes powerful sun/winds/fires/liquors. Alcoholics 猛飲 (*meng2 yin3* = fierce~drink = drink ferociously). With hard training, pianist's skill 突飛猛進 (*tu1 fei1 meng3 jin4* = sudden~fly~stunning~progress = improves spectacularly).

Tigers killed a woman's entire family, but she remained where she lived because the government there was not oppressive. Hence Confucius' comment “苛政猛於虎!” (*ke1 zheng4 meng3 yu2 hu3* = harsh-rule/administration~fierce~than-tiger): “Oppressive governments are worse than tigers!”

by Diana Yue