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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4th 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 anesthesia

醒 (radical 酒 you3, liquor/wine) means 醒來 (xing3 lai2 = wake-come = wake up), 甦醒 (su1 xing3 = revive-wake-up), 醒著 (xing3 zhe0 = awake-continuous = awake). Police 提醒 (ti2 xing3 = remind-wake = reminds/cautions) drivers: drive only when 清醒 (qing1 xing3 = clear-aware = sober/clear-headed). 酒醒 (jiu3 xing3 = wine/liquor-wake) = come to, after hangover.

Preacher claims: 眾人皆醉我獨醒 (zhong4 ren2 jie1 zui4 wo3 du2 xing3 = many-people-all-drunken-I-only-sober = “I’m the only sane/moral person left!”) Sinners, 警醒! (jue2 xing3 = sense-wake = “Awake, repent!”)

Strategist 一言驚醒夢中人 (yi1 yan2 jing1 xing3 meng4 zhong1 ren2 = one-word/line-startle-wake-dream-inside-person = points out overlooked way/truth). Lobbyists 醒悟 (xing3 wu4 = wake-understand = understand/are enlightened).

by Diana Yue