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 beginning and end

尾
Putonghua pronunciation: wei3
Cantonese pronunciation: mei3
Meaning: tail, end, trail, extremity, stern

尾 (radical 尸 shì, person/corpse) means 尾巴 (wei3 ba1 = tail-part): 馬尾 (ma3 wei3 = horse/pony-tail), 船尾 (chuan2 wei3 = ship/boat's-stern), 風尾 (feng1 wei3 = wind/typhoon's-tail-end). At 月尾 (yue4 wei3 = month’s-end), workmen receive 尾數 (wei3 shu4 = last/outstanding-sums). Management 畏首畏尾 (wei4 shou3 wei4 wei3 = fear-head-fear-tail = acts timidly), project 尾大不掉 (wei3 da4 bu4 diao4 = tail-big-no-wag/drop = rendered uncontrollable by recalcitrant subordinates). Additional chapters are 狗尾續貂 (gou3 wei3 xu2 diao1 = dog's-tail-continue-mink = inferior extension) to novel's superb 結尾 (jie2 wei3 = conclusion-end).

Diva trills 尾音 (wei3 yin1 = tail-note = closing note/syllable). Aria comes to 尾聲 (wei3 sheng1 = tail-sound = closing part/coda).

by Diana Yue