

# 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 more the sky

Putonghua pronunciation: *yun2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wan4*

Meanings: cloud

雲 and 霧 (*wu4*, fog/mist), 雪 (*xue3*, snow), 露 (*lu4*, dew), 雷 (*lei2*, thunder), 電 (*dian4*, electricity/lightning) all have radical 雨 (*yu3*, rain). Summer sky has 藍天白雲 (*lan2 tian1 bai2 yun2* = blue~sky~white~clouds). 火燒雲 (*huo3 shao1 yun2* = fire~burn~clouds) = flaming clouds at dawn/dusk. 烏雲 (*wu1 yun2* = black~clouds) forecast rain.

Fairies 騰雲駕霧 (*teng2 yun2 jia4 wu4* = fly-up~clouds~ride~mist = move/fly in sky). Soaring rocket pierces 雲層 (*yun2 cheng2* = cloud-layers). Dropping of A-bomb creates 菌狀雲 (*jun1 zhuang4 yhun2* = mushroom~shaped~cloud).

風雲人物 (*feng1 yun2 ren2 wu4* = wind~cloud~person~thing) means persons recognized as most successful/powerful/influential. 雲遊四方 (*yun2 you2 si4 fang1* = cloud~travel~four~directions) describes carefree Daoist/monk who drops chores, roams freely alone faraway.

by Diana Yue