

# 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 regime change



Putonghua pronunciation: *wei2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wai4*

Meanings: enclose, surround, contain

Character 圍 shows square enclosing something. Planets 圍繞 (*wei2 rao3* = surround-go-around) sun. Garden has 圍牆 (*wei2 qiang2* = enclosing-wall). 圍爐取暖 (*wei2 lu2 qu2 nuan3* = surround-stove-take-warmth) = huddle around stove for warmth. 圍堵 (*wei2 du3* = surround-block-off = containment) is a political strategy. 圍棋 (*wei2 qi2* = enclose-chess = Go) players 圍地吃子 (*wei2 di4 chi1 zi3* = block-off-territory-capture-pieces/stones). Onlookers 圍觀 (*wei2 guan1* = surround-watch = surround them, watch).

Protesters 重重圍困 (*chong2 chong2 wei2 kun4* = layer-layer-surround-confine = lay heavy siege on) parliament, 圍攻 (*wei2 gong1* = surround-attack) officials. Officials cannot 突圍 (*tu1 wei2* = protrude-enclose = break through siege), call army to 解圍 (*jie3 wei2* = untie/dissolve-surround = break up siege).

by Diana Yue