

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 Ebola

窮

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kung4*

Meaning: lack, exhaust, needy, impoverished, poor, poverty

窮 (showing 身 *shen1*, body 弓 *gong1*, bent under 穴 *xue2*, cave) means exhaustive/helpless/impoverished. Police 窮追 (*qiong2 zui1* = persistently-chase) thief into 窮巷 (*qiong2 xiang4* = dead-end-alley = cul-de-sac). 窮光蛋 (*qiong2 guang1 dan4* = impoverished-bare-egg) = penniless guy.

窮人 (*qiong2 ren2* = poor-people) live below 貧窮線 (*pin2 qiong2 xian2* = needy-poor-line = poverty line), 喊窮 (*han3 qiong2* = yell-poor = declare/complain they are poor), feel 人窮志短 (*ren2 qiong2 zhi4 duan3* = person-poor-courage-short = broke and demoralized).

In Ebola-stricken 窮國 (*qiong2 guo2* = poor-countries), governments 技窮 (*ji4 qiong2* = skills-exhaust = cannot do more). But scientist 窮一生之力 (*qiong2 yi1 sheng1 zhi1 li4* = exhaust-one-life-'s-efforts = spends whole life) developing anti-Ebola drugs.

by Diana Yue