

# 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 hawkers

擺

Putonghua pronunciation: *bai 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baai 2*

Meanings: wave, wriggle, put display, sway

擺 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means waving hand/arm. 擺手 (*bai2 shou3* = wave hand/arm) = wave hand/arm to accost/dismiss. 擺脫 (*bai3 tuo1* = wave/wriggle-free) = struggle free. Cupboards 擺放 (*bai3 fang4* = place-put = contain/hold) food/kitchenware. Interior designers use 擺設 (*bai3 she4* = display-furnish = decorative items) artistically.

In 市集 (*shi4 ji2* = market-gatherings = marketplaces) hawkers 擺地攤 (*bai3 di4 tan1* = place-ground-stand = display goods on the ground), 擺賣 (*bai3 mai4* = display-sell) goods. In super-markets shelves 擺滿 (*bai2 man3* = place-full = are stacked with) goods.

大搖大擺 (*da4 yao2 da4 bai3* = big-wave-big-sway) describes swaggering/haughty people. 搖擺不定 (*yao2 bai3 bu2 ding4* = wave-sway-not-steady) describes unpredictable market trends or fickle/wavering politicians.