

# 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 fortune-telling

吉

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gat1*

Meanings: lucky

吉 = auspicious/luck: 吉利 (*ji1 li4* = lucky/auspicious-beneficial), 吉兆 (*ji2 zhao4* = lucky~omen), 吉祥物 (*ji2 xiang2 wu4* = luck~fortune-object = mascot). “如意吉祥” (*ru2 yi4 ji2 xiang2* = as-desire-luck~fortune = “Good fortune as desired”) are words of blessing.

通書 (*tong1 shu1* = through~book = fortune-telling almanac) advises: choose 吉日 (*ji2 ri4* = good-luck~days) for 嫁娶 (*jia4 qu3* = marry-husband~marry-wife = wedding), 動土 (*dong4 tu3* = move~earth = inaugurate digging/construction), 遠行 (*yuan3 xing2* = far~walk/travel).

Lucky guys 吉星高照 (*ji2 xing1 gao1 zhao4* = lucky~star-high-above~shine). Facing obnoxious/precarious persons/situations, smart guys 避之則吉 (*bi4 zhi1 ze2 ji2* = avoid~it~thus~lucky), 溜之大吉 (*liu1 zhi1 da4 ji2* = roll-away~it~big~luck = simply run away).

by Diana Yue