

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 San Francisco

掘

Putonghua pronunciation: *jüe2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwat6*

Meaning: dig, excavate

掘 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) = dig: 掘鑿 (*jüe2 zao2* = dig-cut/chisel into rock), 挖掘 (*wa1 jüe2* = scrape-dig), 掘土 (*jüe2 tu3* = dig-into-earth). Miners 掘洞 (*jüe2 dong4* = dig-holes) to 掘煤 (*jüe2 mei2* = dig-for-coal).

Archaeologists 掘墓 (*jüe2 mu4* = dig-open-tombs = excavate tombs), 掘出 (*jüe2 chu1* = dig-out) mummy. Thieves 掘走 (*jüe2 zou3* = dig-away) mural paintings from Dunhuang caves. Head-hunter 發掘 (*fa1 jüe2* = discover-dig = discovers) new talent. 臨渴掘井 (*lin2 ke3 jüe2 jing3* = approaching-thirst-dig-well) means belated attempt at last-minute solution.

In California Gold Rush (1848-55) people 掘金 (*jüe2 jin1* = dug-for-gold). 掘金娘子 (*jüe2 jin1 niang2 zi0* = dig-gold-woman-diminutive) = pretty girls making bucks off rich men.

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