

# 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 precious stones

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jing1*

Meanings: crystal, crystal-clear, glittering, brilliant

晶 (three 日 *ri4*, suns) means crystal-clear/bright. Stars are 亮晶晶 (*liang4 jing1 jing1* = glowing~bright~bright = bright). Dew-drops look 晶瑩 (*jing1 ying2* = crystal~bright).

結晶 (*jie2 jing1* = form~crystal) = crystallization. 石英 (*shi2 ying1* = stone~flower = quartz) is 晶體 (*jing1 ti3* = crystal~body = crystal): 水晶 (*shui3 jing2* = water~crystal = pure quartz crystal), 紫晶 (*zi3 jing1* = purple~crystal = amethyst). Baby is 愛情結晶品 (*ai4 qing2 jie2 jing1 pin3* = love~emotion~form~crystal~product = love's crystallization).

TVs use 液晶 (*yi4 jing1* = liquid~crystal) display. Computers use 晶片 (*jing1 pian4* = crystal~flat-piece = chips). Hongkong's 八達通 (*ba1 da2 tong1* = eight~arrive~through = Octopus) is 晶片卡 (*jing1 pian4 ka3* = crystal~flat-piece~card = chip card).

by Diana Yue