

# 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 practice

背

Putonghua pronunciation: *bei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *boo13*

Meanings: memorize, recite from memory

背 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat) = person/animal/thing's 背部 (*bei4 bu4* = back~part/side). 背後 (*bei4 hou4* = back-behind) = behind. 背光 (*bei4 guang1* = back~to-light) = against the light. Villa 背山面海 (*bei4 shan1 mian4 hai3* = back~hills~face-sea = sits in front of hills, facing sea).

Traitor 背叛 (*bei4 pan4* = turns-his-back-on~betrays) leader. Camel/scapegoat 背負 (*bei4 fu4* = back-carry = carries) load/blame. Fabrics have 面 (*mian4*, top-side), 背 (*bei4*, reverse-side), hence 背書 (*bei4 shu1* = back/reverse~book) means put books behind, memorize books' contents, learn by rote.

Actors 背台詞 (*bei4 tai2 ci2* = memorize~stage~lines). Taiji practitioners 背口訣 (*bei4 kou3 jue2* = memorize~mouth~rhyme = memorize/recite jingle for prompting learners). Scholars 背詩 (*bei4 shi1* = recite~poetry).

by Diana Yue