

# 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 centenary celebrations

年

Putonghua pronunciation: *nian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *nin4*

Meanings: year, age

Character 年 (radical 禾 *he2*, grain-shoot) = year: tree's 年輪 (*nian2 lun2* = annual/growth~rings), farmer's 豐年 (*feng1 nian2* = abundant~year/harvest), school's 學年 (*xue2 nian2* = academic~year), government's 財政年度 (*cai2 zheng4 nian2 du4* = wealth~policy~year~pass = financial year). 光年 (*guang1 nian2* = light~years) mark star's distance.

年月 (*nian2 yue4* = years~months) = time. Person's 年紀 (*nian2 ji3* = year~record) = 歲數 (*sui4 shu4* = year~number) = age: 十歲 (*shi2 sui4* = ten~year/age = aged ten), 青年 (*qing1 nian2* = green~years = youth/youngster), 中老年 (*zhong1 lao3 nian2* = middle~old~age).

和平年代 (*he2 ping2 nian2 dai4* = harmony~level~years~generation = peaceful era) fosters 百年大計 (*bai3 nian2 da4 ji4* = hundred~years~big~plan = very long-term/ambitious plans).