

# 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 false hopes

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hot3*

Meanings: thirst, thirsty, yearn for

渴 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) and 喝 (*he1*, drink, radical 口 *kou3*, mouth) have related shapes/sounds/meanings. When 口 渴 (*kou3 ke3* = mouth~thirsty), 喝水 (*he1 shui3* = drink~water), because water 解渴 (*jie3 ke3* = relieves~thirst). 臨渴掘井 (*lin2 ke2 jue2 jing3* = upon~thirst-dig~well) means making belated efforts to solve problem.

Man 渴慕 (*ke3 mu4* = thirst/greatly~admires/adores) girl, 渴望 (*ke3 wang4* = thirst/earnestly~hopes-to) date her. Company 渴求 (*ke3 qiu2* = thirst/earnestly~seeks) talent. Fasting causes 饑渴 (*ji1 ke3* = hunger~thirst).

Story goes: General 哄騙 (*hong2 pian4* = coaxes~deceives) tired/thirsty soldiers, “Look at the plum-trees ahead! Soon you won’t feel thirsty!” Hence idiom 望梅止渴 (*wang4 mei2 zhi3 ke3* = look-at-plum-stop~thirst) means getting false hopes from false promises.

by Diana Yue