

# 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 grasslands

牧

(radical 牛 *niu2*, cattle)

Putonghua pronunciation: *mu 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *muk 6*

Meanings: let graze, herd, herdsman

牧 = 畜牧 (*cu4 mu4* = breed-herd) animals: 牛 (*niu2*, cattle/cows/bulls/buffalos), 羊 (*yang2*, sheep/goats/rams/ewes), 馬 (*ma3* = horses/ponies/stallions/mares), 豬 (*zhu1*, pigs/swine/hogs), 駱駝 (*luo4 tuo2* = camels). 遊牧民族 (*you2 mu4 min2 zu2* = roam-herd-people-tribe = nomadic tribes) seek grasslands/pastures to 放牧 (*fang4 mu4* = free-graze = let animals graze).

Chinese paintings depict 牧童 (*mu4 tong2* = herd-child = shepherd/buffalo boy) riding 水牛 (*shui3 niu2* = water-cattle = water buffalo). Westerners feature 牛仔 (*niu2 zai3* = cow-boys) working on 牧場 (*mu4 chang3* = herd-field = ranches).

Christianity likens Jesus to 牧羊人 (*mu4 yang2 ren2* = herd-sheep-person = shepherd) leading 羊群 (*yang2 qun2* = sheep-group = flock), hence the term 牧師 (*mu4 shi1* = shepherd-master = pastor/vicar).