

# 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 housing

地

Putonghua pronunciation: *di4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dei6*

Meanings: land

地 (radical 土 *tu3*, earth) = 土地 (*tu3 di4* = earth/soil-land): 地球 (*di4 qiu2* = land~ball = planet Earth), 地上 (*di4 shang4* = land~above = on land/ground/floor), 地方 (*di4 fang1* = land-square = area/place/premises).

Ancient Israelites crossed deserts, 不毛之地 (*bu4 mao2 zhi1 di4* = no-hair~'s-land = unarable/barren regions), reached Canaan, 流奶與蜜之地 (*liu2 nai3 yu3 mi4 zhi1 di4* = flow~milk~and~honey~'s-land = land of milk and honey), 落地生根 (*luo4 di4 sheng1 gen1* = fall-on-land~grow~roots = settled down). 18th-century nobles/bourgeoisie 圈地 (*quan1 di4* = enclosed~land-plots), ousting farmers who 種地 (*zhong4 di4* = planted/farmed-the-land).

Government 勾地 (*gou1 di4* = encircles/lists~land-plots for sale), 賣地 (*mai4 di4* = sells~land). Developers 買地 (*mai3 di4* = buy~land).