

# 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 flooding

湖

Putonghua pronunciation: *hu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo4*

Meanings: lake

湖 (= 泊 *bo1*, lake)'s 蓄水量 (*xu4 shui3 liang4* = store~water~volume) comes from rivers/rainfall. 天然湖 (*tian1 ran2 hu2* = heaven~formed~lake = natural lakes), 人工湖 (*ren2 gong1 hu2* = human~work~lake = artificial lakes) supply 湖水 (*hu2 shui3* = lake~water) for irrigation.

Tourists visit England's 湖區 (*Hu2 Qu1* = Lake~District), China's 西湖 (*Xi1 Hu2* = West~Lake) for 湖光山色 (*hu2 guang1 shan1 se1* = lakes'~light~hills'~color = light/color variations in hills-and-lakes scenery).

Chinese novel 《水滸傳》 (*shui3 hu3 zhuan4* = water-margin~record/legend = The Water Margin) glorifies bandit-heroes occupying Shandong Province's lakes-marshland. Idiomatic term 江湖 (*jiang1 hu2* = rivers~lakes) means underworld of outlaws. 江湖人物 (*jiang1 hu2 ren2 wu4* = river~lake~person~thing) means characters having such background/connections.