

# 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 empires

雄

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung4*

Meanings: male, hero, brave, strong, powerful

Animals are either 雌 (*ci1*, female) or 雄 (*xiong2*, male). Two opponents 一決雌雄 (*yi1 jue2 ci1 xiong2* = one~decide~female~male = fight/compete to decide who is stronger). 英雄 (*ying1 xiong2* = outstanding~male = hero) shows 雄姿 (*xiong2 zi1* = heroic~posture) on horseback. 資本雄厚 (*zi1 ben3 xiong2 hou4* = capital~principal~strong~thick) = capital-rich.

拿破崙 (*Na2 Po4 Lun2* = “Napoleon”-transliterated) 雄心勃勃 (*xiong2 xin1 bo2 bo2* = heroic~heart~rise~rise = had great ambitious), built up 雄師 (*xiong2 shi1* = powerful~army), conquered half of Europe by 雄才偉略 (*xiong2 cai2 wei3 lue4* = hero~talents~great~plans = grand vision/plans/abilities).

梟雄 (*xiao1 xiong2* = owl~hero) describes brilliant but devilish men such as 希特拉 (*Xi2 Te4 La1* = “Hitler”- transliterated).