

# 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 passive waiting

兔

Putonghua pronunciation: *tu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to3*

Meanings: rabbit, hare

兔 = 兔子 (*tu4 zi0* = rabbit-diminutive = rabbit/hare). 動如脫兔 (*dong4 ru2 tuo1 tu4* = move-resemble-escaped-rabbit) = energetic/dashing about. 兔兒爺 (*tu4 er0 ye2* = rabbit-diminutive-lord = rabbit-doll) is traditional Chinese idol/toy. 兔女郎 (*tu4 nü3 lang2* = rabbit-woman/girl-lad) = Playboy magazine's bunny girls.

兔死狐悲 (*tu4 si3 hu2 bei1* = hare-dies-fox-sad) = mourn destruction/perishing of kindred spirit. Sly person 狡兔三窟 (*jiao3 tu4 san1 ku1* = sly-hare-three-holes = has multiple hideouts to avoid enemies). 兔死狗烹 (*tu4 si3 gou3 peng1* = hare-dead-dog-cooked) describes cruel exploiter: lackey kills for boss, boss eliminates lackey.

守株待兔 (*shou3 zhu1 dai4 tu4* = wait-by-stump-wait-for-hare) describes lazy/dumb/inflexible/passive person waiting for tiniest chance: a second rabbit killed bumping against tree-stump.

by Diana Yue