

# 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 Victoria Harbour

Putonghua pronunciation: *an4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngon6*

Meanings: shore

海岸 (*hai3 an4*) = sea coast/shore. 天星小輪 (*tian1 xing1 xiao3 lun2* = sky~star~little~wheel/machine-boat = the Star Ferry) sails between 維港兩岸 (*wei2 gang3 liang3 an4* = Victoria-Harbour~two~shores). When it 泊岸 (*bo2 an4* = park~shore), passengers 上岸 (*shang4 an4* = up~shore = go onshore).

兩岸關係 (*liang3 an4 guan1 xi4* = two~shores/sides~relationship) = relationship/tension between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. 兩頭不到岸 (*liang3 tou2 bu4 dao4 an4* = two~heads/ends~no~reach~shore/land) describes something that is neither here nor there.

Buddhists preach enlightenment/repentance: “苦海無邊，回頭是岸” (*ku3 hai3 wu2 bian1, hui2 tou2 sh4i an4* = bitterness/sufferings~sea~no~border/end, turn~head~is~shore/land) = human existence is endless suffering; turn back and you will find transcendence.

by Diana Yue