

# 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 flowers

採

Putonghua pronunciation: *cai3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choi2*

Meanings: pick, pluck, gather, collect, adopt

採 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou2*, hand/arm) = 採摘 (*cai3 zhai1* = pick~remove). Plantation laborers 採茶 (*cai3 cha2* = pick/pluck~tea-leaves from tea-shrubs). Herbalists 採藥 (*cai3 yao4* = pick~medicine = search natural vegetation to collect medicinal herbs). Musicians 採風 (*cai3 feng1* = pick~wind/poetry = travel around collecting folk-tunes).

Investigator 採集 (*cai3 ji2* = pick~collect) evidence, 採訪 (*cai2 fang3* = collect~visit = interview) eye-witnesses. 採耳 (*cai3 er3* = pick~ear) = remove ear-wax with ear-scraper.

採花 (*cai3 hua1* = pick-flowers) = pick/gather flowers. Poets eulogize 採菊 (*cai3 ju2* = picking~chrysanthemums). Girls sing 採蓮謠 (*cai3 lian2 yao2* = pick~lotus~song) while picking blooms on lotus-ponds. However, 採花賊 (*cai3 hua1 zei2* = pick-flower-thief) means man who steals into households to rape/de-flower women.

by Diana Yue