

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 more the sky



Putonghua pronunciation: *ri4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yat6*

Meanings: sun

In Daoist terminology, 日 = 太陽 (*tai4 yang2* = ultimate-*yang*/male essence), 月 (*yue4*, moon) = 太陰 (*tai4 yin1* = ultimate-*yin*/female essence).

In Chinese mythology, 羿射九日 (*Yi4 she4 jiu3 ri4* = skilled archer Yi shot down nine suns and left one shining). 天狗食日 (*tian1 gou3 shi2 ri4* = heavenly-dog-ate-sun) causes 日蝕 (*ri4 shi2* = sun-erode = solar eclipse). Rivaling camps insist 天無二日 (*tian1 wu2 er4 ri4* = sky-doesn't-have-two-suns = entire kingdom should allow only one king/leader).

日出 (*ri4 chu1* = sun-out) = sunrise. 日子 (*ri4 zi0* = sun/day-diminutive) means day. Man proposes to woman: 跟我過日子! (*gen1 wo3 guo4 ri4 zi0* = follow-me-pass-days = Come live with me and be my spouse!)