

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: *lan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *laam4*

Meanings: blue

藍 = 藍色 (*lan2 se1* = blue~color): 淺藍 (*qian3 lan2* = light~blue), 粉藍 (*fen3 lan2* = powder~blue = pastel/baby blue), 深藍 (*shen1 lan2* = deep/dark~blue), 藍鯨 (*lan2 jing1* = blue~whale), 藍牙 (*lan2 ya2* = blue~tooth). Barbie has 金髮藍眼 (*jin1 fa3 lan2 yan3* = gold/blonde~hair~blue~eyes).

Writer uses real event as 藍本 (*lan2 ben3* = blue~version = original version/model) for novel/movie. Conservative investor keeps 藍籌股 (*lan2 chou2 gu3* = blue~chip~stocks). Factory workers are 藍領階級 (*lan2 ling3 jie1 ji2* = blue~collar~step~class = blue-collar class).

青 (*qing1*) means green or 藍: 青山 (*qing1 shan1* = green~hills), 青天 (*qing1 tian1* = blue~sky). 碧海藍天 (*bi4 hai3 lan2 tian1* = turquoise/emerald~sea~blue~sky) describes sunny seascape.