

Character Builder 您好嗎？秋

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 autumn

秋

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chau1*

Meanings: autumn

秋天 (*qiu1 tian1* = autumn~sky/day) = 秋季 (*qiu1 ji4* = autumn~season). After 立秋 (*li4 qiu1* = stand/begin~autumn = 13th solar-term), 秋分 (*qiu1 fen1* = autumn~divide = 16th solar-term, autumn equinox) come 中秋 (*zhong1 qiu1* = mid~autumn), 深秋 (*shen1 qiu1* = deep/late~autumn).

Poet sighs: 一葉知秋! (*yi1 ye4 zhi1 qiu1* = a~leaf~knows~autumn = A falling leaf - it's autumn!), 一雨成秋! (*yi1 yu3 cheng2 qiu1* = a~rain~becomes~autumn = It rained - autumn has set in!) 秋山紅葉 (*chiu1 shan1 hong2 ye4* = autumn~hills~red~leaves) = hillsides' fall foliage.

Farmers 秋收冬藏 (*qiu1 shou1 dong1 cang2* = autumn~collect~winter~store = reap autumn harvest for winter storage). In old China, death-penalty prisoners were given 秋決 (*qiu1 jue2* = autumn~execution).