

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 looking pretty



Putonghua pronunciation: *yan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngaan5*

Meanings: eye

眼 = 目 (*mu4*). 白眼 (*bai2 yan3* = white-eye) = disdainful/discriminatory expression/attitude. 眼紅 (*yan3 hong2* = eye-red) means envious/jealous. 目光遠大 (*mu4 guang1 yuan3 da4* = eye~light~far~big) means having far-reaching vision.

Women 畫眉 (*hua4 mei2* = draw/paint-eyebrows), apply 眼線 (*yan3 xian4* = eye~liner), 眼影 (*yan3 ying3* = eye~shadow), 睫毛液 (*jie2 mao2 yi4* = eye-lash-hair-liquid = mascara). 眼淚 (*yan3 lei4* = eyes' tears) ruin 眼部化妝 (*yan3 bu4 hua4 zhuang1* = eye-part~transform~makeup = eye-makeup).

鳳目 (*feng4 mu4* = phoenix~eyes) = beautiful slanting eyes. 杏眼圓睜 (*xing4 yan3 yuan2 zheng1* = apricot-eyes-round~wide-open) describes pretty woman's angry wide-eyed stare. Lovely woman's charming glances make poet exclaim: “美目盼兮!” (*mei3 mu4 pan4 xi1* = beautiful-eyes~glance~ah!)

by Diana Yue