

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 funerals



Putonghua pronunciation: *qi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yap1*

Meaning: weep, sob, tears

泣 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) means shedding tears, tears or weeping/crying softly: 哭泣 (*ku1 qi4* = cry-weep), 涕泣 (*ti4 qi4* = nose-fluid-tears = shed tears and blow nose).

Visitor and prisoner 泣別 (*qi4 bie2* = weep-depart = take leave shedding tears). 牛衣對泣 (*niu2 yi1 dui4 qi4* = cattle's-straw-cloak-facing-weep) describes impoverished couple with no way out grieving together.

Air-crash victim's widow 抽泣 (*chou1 qi4* = pull-weep = weeps/sobs chokingly), 泣血 (*qi1 xue3* = weep-blood = weeps noiselessly as if bleeding noiselessly, or weeps so hard her eyes ooze blood), orphans 泣不成聲 (*qi4 bu4 cheng2 sheng1* = weep-no-form-sound = weep and can't say anything).

Watching them, relatives 泣下 (*qi4 xia4* = tears-fall = shed tears).

by Diana Yue