

Character Builder 您好學？

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 fall colors

紅

Putonghua pronunciation: *hong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung4*

Meaning: scarlet, red, turn red, popular, prosperous, leftist

紅 (radical 纟 = 絲 *si1*, silk) = red: 紅日 (*hong2 ri4* = red-sun), 血紅 (*xue3 hong2* = blood-red), 火紅 (*huo3 hong2* = fiery-red), Russia's 紅軍 (*hong2 jun* = Red-Army), China's 紅衛兵 (*hong2 wei4 bing1* = red-guard-soldier = Red Guards).

Star 走紅 (*zou3 hong2* = run-red = wins popularity). Cars stop at 紅燈 (*hong2 deng1* = red-light). Man discovered visiting 紅燈區 (*hong2 deng1 qu1* = red-light-district) 臉紅 (*lian3 hong2* = face-red = blushes).

紅樹 (*hong2 shu4* = red-tree) = trees with red flowers/leaves, e.g. 楓樹 (*feng1 shu4* = maple-tree). 紅樹林 (*hong2 shu4 lin2* = red-tree-grove) = mangrove forest. 看破紅塵 (*kan4 po4 hong2 chen2* = see-through-red-dust) means disillusioned about glitzy world/life's vanities/follies.

by Diana Yue