

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 insects



Putonghua pronunciation: *ying 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying 4*

Meanings: fly

蒼蠅 (*cang1 ying2* = dark-green/blue~fly = house flies), 蚊子 (*wen3 zi0* = mosquitoes), 白蟻 (*bai2 yi3* = white~ant = termites), 血吸蟲 (*xue4 xi1 chong2* = blood~sucking~insect = blood-flukes), 蟑螂 (*zhang1 lang2* = cockroaches), 虱 (*shi1* = lice) are harmful insects. Fly's 蛆 (*qu1* = larva/maggot) also means disgusting/despicable person.

嗡嗡 (*weng1 weng1*) is Chinese onomatopoeia for fly's buzzing. Small businesses earn 蠅頭小利 (*ying2 tou2 xiao3 li4* = fly's~head~small~profit = tiny bit of profit). 蠅頭小字 (*ying2 tou2 xiao3 zi4* = fly's~head~small~words/characters) means tiny words written in fine brushstrokes.

蠅拍 (*ying2 pai1* = fly~swatters) kill flies. However, Cantonese expression 拍烏蠅 (*paak3 woo1 ying4* = swatting~black~flies) means shop's/firm's business is terrible (employees are idly swatting flies).