

# 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:

- 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 circuses

Putonghua pronunciation: **cai3**

Cantonese pronunciation: **choi2**

Meanings: multi-colored, colorful, luck

彩 (采 **cai3**, gather + 彡 = 三 **san1**, three) means 彩色 (**cai3 se1** = multi-color-hues), 光彩 (**guang1 cai3** = brilliance-iridescence), 彩虹 (**cai3 hong2** = iridescent-rainbow) = rainbow. 唐三彩 (**Tang2 san1 cai3** = Tang-Dynasty-tri-color potteryware) has yellow-green-red glaze.

光彩照人 (**guang1 cai3 zhou4 ren2** = light-colors-shine-on-people) describes glamorous woman. 神彩飛揚 (**shen2 cai3 fei1 yang2** = spirit-multi-colors-fly-raise) describes spirited/inspired look/writing. 博彩 (**bao2 cai3** = risk-luck) = gambling.

Circus show 多彩多姿 (**duo1 cai3 duo1 zi1** = many-colors-many-gestures = has attractive variety). Laser-lighting is 七彩繽紛 (**qi1 cai3 bin1 fen1** = seven-colors-profuse-many = colorful, eye-dazzling). Audience 喝彩 (**he1 cai3** = loudly-applaud), never 喝倒彩 (**he1 dao3 cai3** = shout-reverse-splendid = boo).

by Diana Yue