

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 lovers



Putonghua pronunciation: *wen3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *man5*

Meanings: proboscis, mouth, kiss

Animal's 吻部 (*wen3 bu4* = mouth/lips/jaws-part) = proboscis. Storyteller uses lively 口吻 (*kou3 wen3* = mouth-proboscis = speech/narrative tone). Judge accepts evidence that 吻合 (*wen3 he2* = lips-join = match). 虎吻 (*hu3 wen3* = tiger's-mouth/jaws) = extremely dangerous situation.

接吻 (*jie1 wen3* = connect-kiss) = kissing: 輕吻 (*qing1 wen3* = light-kiss = lightly-touching kiss), 熱吻 (*re2 wen3* = hot-kiss = kiss violently), 濕吻 (*shi1 wen3* = wet-kiss = French kiss). Father asks little daughter: “給爸爸一個吻!” (*gei2 ba4 ba0 yi1 g4 wen3* = give-pa-pa-one-unit-kiss = “Give Daddy a kiss!”)

吻別 (*wen3 bie2* = kiss-depart) = kiss someone goodbye. Starlet 拋飛吻 (*pao1 fei1 wen3* = throw-fly-kiss = blows/throws kisses) at fans.

by Diana Yue