

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:

- 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 fame and notoriety

Putonghua pronunciation: **chou4**

Cantonese pronunciation: **chau3**

Meaning: stink, rank, odor, rotten, repulsive, nasty, abhorrent

臭 (自 *zi4*, self/nose + 犬 *qūan3*, dog) suggests dog sniffing 臭味 (*chou4 wei4* = stinking-smell). Rubbish-bin 臭氣薰天 (*chou4 qi4 xūn1 tiān1* = stinking-gas-smoke-sky = smells horrible). Deceased's 臭皮囊 (*chou4 pi2 nang2* = stinking-skin-bag = body) emits 屍臭 (*shī chou4* = corpse's-rotting-odor).

臭蟲 (*chou4 chong2* = stinking-worm/bug) = bed-bug. 臭氧層 (*chou4 yang3 ceng2* = stinking-oxygen-layer) = ozone-layer. Red Guards 臭罵 (*chou4 ma4* = fiercely-condemned) 臭老九 (*chou4 lao3 jiu3* = stinking-old-nine = intellectuals): “臭美!” (*chou4 mei3* = stinking-pretty = “Smug/conceited/show-off!”)

Snob having 臭錢 (*chou4 qian2* = stinking-money) shows 臭架子 (*chou4 jia4 zi0* = stinking-rack-diminutive = nasty-airs/ways), 臭名遠托 (*chou4 ming2 yuān3 bo4* = stinking/dirty-name-far- spread = is notorious far-and-wide).

by Diana Yue