

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 anesthesia

痲

Putonghua pronunciation: *ma2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ma1*

Meaning: fiber crops, hemp, flax, jute, numerous, confused, chaotic, numbness, paralysis

痲 (radical 广 *yan3*, house) means crop/fabric/disease/numbness: 痲袋 (*ma2 dai4* = jute-cloth-sack), 痲布 (*ma2 bu4* = flaxen-cloth = linen). Kids 出痲 (*chu1 ma2* = get-measles). Hippies 吸大痲 (*xi1 da4 ma2* = smoke-marijuana/cannabis). 密密痲痲 (*mi4 mi4 ma2 ma2* = packed-packed-hemp-hemp = densely-packed) engagements make us feel 心亂如痲 (*xin1 luan4 ru2 ma2* = heart-confused-resemble-hemp = confused/restless), 痲煩 (*ma2 fan2* = hemp-frustrate = troubled/worried), 痲痺 (*ma2 bi4* = numb-insensitive/unfeeling), 痲目不仁 (*ma2 mu4 bu4 ren2* = numb-wooden/hardened-not-kind = apathetic). 痲醉師 (*ma2 zui4 shi1* = numb-intoxicate-master = anesthesiologist) uses 痲醉藥 (*ma2 zui4 yao4* = anesthetic/narcotic drug) for 全身 (*quan2 shen1* = entire-body = general) anesthesia, 局部 (*ju2 bu4* = unit-part = local) anesthesia.

by Diana Yue