

# 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:

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 hair

Putonghua pronunciation: *shu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *soh1*

Meanings: comb, brush, smoothen, tidy

梳 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = 梳篦 (*shu1 bi4* = comb-dense-teeth-comb), 梳子 (*shu1 zi0* = comb-diminutive = comb): 木梳 (*mu4 shu1* = wooden-comb), 骨梳 (*gu3 shu1* = bone-comb). 梳洗 (*shu1 xi3* = comb-wash) = 梳頭洗臉 (*shu1 tou2 xi2 lian3* = comb-our-hair-wash-our-face) = morning toilette.

Women 梳妝打扮 (*shu1 zhuang1 da3 ban4* = comb-toilette-do-make-up = groom hair, deck-up face/body): 電髮 (*dian4 fa3* = electric/electrify-hair = perm hair), 梳辮 (*shu1 bian1* = comb/wear-braid/plait/pigtail), 梳髻 (*shu1 ji4* = comb-bun-shaped-hair = do hair up into a bun/bobtail).

Detective 梳理 (*shu1 li3* = comb-arrange = analyzes/clarifies) cues/arguments. Olden-day Cantonese housemaids 梳起唔嫁 (*shu1 qi3 ng2 jia4* = Cantonese “*soh1 hei2 ng2 ga3*” = comb-up-hair-no-marry = lead spinster’s life).

by Diana Yue