

# 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 anesthesia

Putonghua pronunciation: *hun1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fan1*

Meaning: dim, dusk, faint, muddled, confused, stupid, senseless, coma

昏 (日 *ri4*, sun/day under 氏 *yi4*, horizon) describes 昏暗 (*hun1 an4* = dim-dark) room, 昏黃 (*hun1 huang2* = dimmed-yellowed) pages, 昏亂 (*hun1 luan4* = confused-disorderly) scene/situation. 黃昏 (*huang2 hun1* = yellow-dim) = evening/dusk. Night-shift workers 晨昏顛倒 (*shen2 hun1 dian1 dao3* = morning-evening-turn-upside-down = reverse night/day).

天昏地暗 (*tian1 hun1 di4 an4* = heaven-darken-earth-dim) describes sunless/stormy landscape. 老眼昏花 (*lao3 yan3 hun1 hua1* = old-eyes-dim-blurred) describes dim-sighted oldies. 昏君 (*hun1 jun1* = brainless/immoral-monarch) trusts 昏庸 (*hun1 yong1* = brainless-mediocre/stupid) ministers.

Anesthesia causes 昏睡 (*hun1 shui4* = stupor/coma-sleep). Pot-smoker 頭昏腦脹 (*tou2 hun1 nao3 zhang4* = head-murky-brain-swelling = feels head bursting), 昏倒 (*hun1 dao3* = faints/swoons-collapses), 昏迷 (*hun1 mi2* = faints-mesmerized).

by Diana Yue