

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 flowers

花

Putonghua pronunciation: *hua1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fa1*

Meanings: flower, showy

花 = 花朵 (*hua1 duo3* = flower~classifier) = 花兒 (*hua1 er0* = flower~diminutive). In 花園 (*hua1 yuan2* = flower~garden) gardeners 種花 (*zhong4 hua1* = plant/cultivate~flowers), visitors 賞花 (*shang3 hua1* = admire~flowers).

花 symbolizes women. 校花 (*xiao4 hua1* = school~flower) = school's top belle. 名花有主 (*ming2 hua1 you3 zhu3* = famous~flower~has~master) = she already has fiance/husband. 花花公子 (*hua1 hua1 gong1 zi0* = flashy~flashy~lord's~son) = playboy.

Clever writer 妙筆生花 (*miao4 bu3 sheng1 hua1* = charming~pen~sprouts~flowers). Eloquent talker 舌燦蓮花 (*she3 can4 lian2 hua1* = tongue~radiant~lotus~flowers). 錦上添花 (*jin3 shang4 tian1 hua1* = brocade~top~add~flowers) describes fortunate person/situation getting additional blessing/forte. 花好月圓 (*hua1 hao3 yue4 yuan2* = flowers~good~moon~round) = wedding-night bliss.

by Diana Yue