

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 the ugly duckling

醜

Putonghua pronunciation: *chou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chau2*

Meanings: ugly, unsightly, shameful, undignified, unpleasant, grotesque, disgusting

醜 (radical 鬼 *gui3*, ghost) describes ugly appearance/nature, is opposite of 美 (*mei3*, beauty/beautiful). 醜八怪 (*chou3 bai guai4* = ugly~eight~odd) = ugly-looking person/creature. 醜陋 (*chou3 lou4* = ugly~shabby/unpresentable) describes ugly/ignoble people/behavior.

醜 gave meaning to 丑角 (*chou3 jue2* = clown~role) in drama. Political clowns 醜態百出 (*chou3 tai4 bai2 chu1* = ugly~gestures/attitudes~hundred~out = put on revolting show). 醜婦終須見家翁 (*chou3 fu3 zhong1 xu1 jian4 jia1 weng1* = ugly~bride~finally~must~see~father-in-law) = unpleasant facts must face scrutiny.

Reality is often 醜惡 (*chou3 e4* = ugly/grotesque~bad/evil). Tabloids print 醜聞 (*chou3 wen2* = dirty-news/scandals) about child-molesters' 醜事 (*chou3 shi4* = ugly~event = shameful/dirty affairs/acts/dealings). Readers exclaim: 醜死了! (*chou3 si3 le0* = ugly~to-death~ed = How shameful/disgusting!)

by Diana Yue