

Character Builder

您好嗎? 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 hair

飾

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sik1*

Meanings: decorate, adorn, embellish, deck up, décor, cover up, play role

飾 (radical 食 *shi2*, eat/feed) means 裝飾 (*zhuang1 shi4* = deck-up-decorate), 飾物 (*shi4 wu4* = decorative-items/jewelry). Actor 飾演 (*shi4 yan3* = deck-up-act = plays) role. 聖誕燈飾 (*sheng4 dan4 deng1 shi4* = holy-birth-lamp-decorations) = Christmas lighting.

修飾 (*xiu1 shi4* = trim-decorate = grooming) can 掩飾 (*yan3 shi4* = cover-decorate = cover up) physical defects. Women wear 首飾 (*shou3 shi4* = head-embellishment = jewelry): 飾針 (*shi4 jin1* = decorative-pin = brooch), 髮飾 (*fa3 shi4* = hair-décor).

矯飾 (*jiao3 shi4* = distort-cover-up) describes pretentious words/actions. Dictator hires media to 文過飾非 (*wen2 guo4 shi4 fei1* = adorn-fault-decorate-wrong = gloss over mistakes/crimes), 粉飾太平 (*fen3 shi4 tai4 ping2* = powder/stucco-cover-up-ultimate-peace = give whitewash to troubled society).

by Diana Yue