

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 babies

粉

Putonghua pronunciation: *fen3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fan2*

Meanings: powder, pasta

粉 (radical 米 *mi3*, rice) means powder/pasta: 麵粉 (*mian4 fen3* = noodle~powder = flour), 米粉 (*mi3 fen3* = rice~flour or rice vermicelli), 粟粉 (*su4 fen3* = corn~starch), 糖粉 (*tang2 fen3* = sugar~powder/icing), 奶粉 (*nai3 fen3* = milk~powder). Mills 磨粉 (*mo2 fen3* = grind/churn-out~powder/flour).

雨粉 (*yü3 fen3* = rain~powder) = tiny drizzle. 上粉 (*shang4 fen3* = up/mount~powder) means powdering surface of dumpling/wall/face. 粉牆 (*fen3 qiang2* = powder~wall) = stucco wall.

Babies have 粉嫩 (*fen3 nuan1* = powdery~young/tender) skin. Baby-room's décor uses 粉彩 (*fen3 cai3* = powder~colors = pastels): 粉紅 (*fen3 hong2* = powdery~red = pink), 粉白 (*fen3 bai2* = powdery/milky~white), 粉藍 (*fen3 lan2* = powdery~blue = baby-blue), 粉黃 (*fen3 huang2* = powdery~yellow = baby-yellow).

by Diana Yue