

# 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 old people

皺

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhou4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jau3*

Meanings: crimple, crumple, crease, wrinkle, wrinkled

皺 (radical 皮 *pi2*, skin) means 打皺 (*da3 zhou4* = beat/become-creased). Brain's surface has 皺摺 (*zhou4 zhe2* = creases-folds). Linens easily 起皺 (*qi3 zhou4* = up-crimple = crimple/crease). 皺眉 (*zhou4 mei2* = wrinkle-eyebrows = knitted brows) is worried expression.

Actress 不認老 (*bu4 ren4 lao3* = no-admit-old = refuses to admit/show age), applies 除皺霜 (*chu2 zhou4 shuang1* = remove-wrinkles-frost/cream) to 去皺 (*qu4 zhou4* = go/remove wrinkles), eliminate 魚尾紋 (*yü2 wei3 wen2* = fish-tail-lines = crows' feet) around eyes.

Dorian Gray 不顯老 (*bu4 xian3 lao3* = no-show-old = shows no sign of aging), but suddenly his picture 變老 (*bian4 lao3* = change-old = turns old), 皺紋滿臉 (*zhou4 wen2 man3 lian3* = has wrinkles-lines-all-over-face).

by Diana Yue