

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:

- 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 pretty women

容

Putonghua pronunciation: *rong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yung4*

Meaning: face, visage, looks, appearance

容 (radical 宀 *mian2*, house's roof) means 容貌 (*rong2 mao4* = face-appearance). 美容院 (*mei3 rong2 yuan4* = beautify-appearance-house = beauty parlors) sell 美容 (*mei3 rong2* = beautify-face = beauty treatment) objects. 整容 (*zheng3 rong2* = fix-appearance) = cosmetic surgery.

Finishing school offers 儀容課 (*yi2 rong2 ke4* = bearing/deportment-appearance-lesson = beauty classes). Idiom 女為悅己者容 (*nü3 wei4 yue4 ji3 zhe3 rong2* = woman-for-fond-of-self-person-make-up) means women/girls will wear pretty makeup/clothes for admirers.

形容詞 (*xing2 rong2 ci2* = describe-word) = adjective. Widow looks 容顏憔悴 (*rong2 yan2 qiao2 cui4* = face-color-anxious-depressed = emaciated). Groom 形容 (*xing2 rong2* = shape-face = describes) bride-to-be: 容光煥發! (*rong2 guang1 huan4 fa1* = face-glow-shine-express = radiant/glowing!)

by Diana Yue