

# Character Builder 您好學? 灰

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 fire

灰

Putonghua pronunciation: *hui1*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *fooi1*  
Meaning: ash, grey, depressed

灰 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) means 灰色 (*hui1 se1* = ash/grey-color), 灰燼 (*hui1 jin4* = ashes-left-from-burning): 煙灰 (*yan1 hui1* = cigarette-ashes), 骨灰 (*gu3 hui1* = bone-ash = cremated person's ashes), 灰暗 (*hui1 an4* = grey-dim) describes overcast sky or unpromising prospects, 灰熊 (*hui1 xiong2* = grey-bear) = grizzly, 灰塵 (*hui1 chen2* = ash-dust) = dust. 灰頭灰臉 (*hui1 tou2 hui1 lian3* = dusty-head-dusty-face) describes dust/dirt-covered or disgraced/embarrassed person, 面如死灰 (*mian4 ru2 si3 hui1* = face-resemble-dead-ashes) describes shocked/grieving person's pale/ashen face.

Loser 灰心 (*hui1 xin1* = ash-heart = feels disappointed/disheartened), 心灰意冷 (*xin1 hui1 yi4 leng3* = heart-ash-intention-cold = discouraged/depressed), 死灰復燃 (*si3 hui1 fu2 ran2* = dead-ashes-again-burn) describes reviving of extinguished hopes/beliefs/activities.

by Diana Yue