

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *li4*
Cantonese pronunciation: *lai6*
Meaning: beautiful, pretty

Pictogram 麗 (一 *yi1*, one/single + 鹿 *lu4*, deer) suggests handsome stag with two horns, means 美麗 (*mei3 li4* = pretty-beautiful), 麗日藍天 (*li4 ri4 lan2 tian1* = beautiful-sun-blue-sky) = nice sunny day. 壯麗山河 (*zhuang4 li4 shan1 he2* = brave-beautiful-mountains-rivers) = country's grand landscape. 天生麗質 (*tian1 sheng1 li4 zhi4* = heaven-born-beautiful-quality) describes woman's natural beauty. 清麗 (*qing1 li4* = pure-looking-pretty) teenager becomes 艷麗 (*yan4 li4* = gorgeously-beautiful) model, poses in 華麗 (*hua2 li4* = luxurious-beautiful) costumes against 富麗 (*fu4 li4* = rich/grand-spectacular) settings.

辦公室麗人 (*ban4 gong1 shi1 li4 ren2* = handle-official-business-room-beautiful-person = office ladies) 爭妍鬥麗 (*zheng1 yan2 dou4 li4* = compete-glamor-vie-beauty = dress/make up to outshine each other).

by Diana Yue