

# 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 cosmetic surgery

抽

Putonghua pronunciation: *chou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chau1*

Meaning: draw, suck, take, pull, select, pick, extract, remove

抽 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) = 抽出 (*chou1 chu1* = draw/pull/pick-out), 抽去 (*chou1 qu1* = draw/take-off/away). Seeds 抽芽 (*chou1 ya2* = pull-young-shoot = bud). Pumps 抽水 (*chou1 shui3* = extract/pump-away-water). 抽血 (*chou1 xue3* = extract-blood) = blood-taking. 抽屜 (*chou1 ti4* = draw-enclosed-container) = drawer.

Detective 抽絲剝繭 (*chou1 si bol jian3* = pull-out-silk-open-up-cocoon = conducts skilled/detailed investigation), pieces 抽象 (*chou1 xiang4* = extract-image = abstract/vague) clues together, 抽空 (*chou1 kong1* = takes-a-while/break), 抽煙 (*chou1 yan1* = suck-smoke = smokes a cigarette).

Scared woman 抽泣 (*chou1 xi1* = draw-in-weep = gasps tearfully) because 抽脂 (*chou1 zhi1* = suction-assisted-fat-removal = lipoplasty/"lipo") operation causes 肌肉抽搐 (*ji1 rou4 chou1 chu4* = muscle-flesh-pull-flinch = muscle spasms).

by Diana Yue