

# 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 new-born babies

甜

Putonghua pronunciation: *tian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tim4*

Meaning: sweet

甜 (舌 *she2*, tongue) means 甘甜 (*gan1 tian2* = pleasantly/ soothingly-sweet): 嗜甜 (*shi4 tian2* = fond-of-sweets), 甜品 (*tian2 pin3* = sweet-things/desserts), 心甜 (*xin1 tian2* = heart-feeling-sweet/pleased), 甜美 (*tian2 mei3* = sweet-pretty) face/voice/smile. 甜酸苦辣 (*tian2 suan1 ku3 la4* = sweet-sour-bitter-spicy-hot) describes multiple tastes/experiences. Cheats get 甜頭 (*tian2 tou2* = sweet-tip/head = advantages) by using 甜言蜜語 (*tian2 yan2 mi4 yu3* = sweet-sayings-honeyed-words). PRC slogan 憶苦思甜 (*yi1 ku3 si1 tian2* = remember-bitter-think/reflect-sweet) means "Remember difficult past, treasure today's success/happiness".

Baby is Dad's 甜心 (*tian2 xin1* = sweet-heart/honey/darling), 甜甜一笑 (*tian2 tian2 yi1 xiao4* = sweetly-sweetly-one-smile = a sweet smile) makes Dad feel 甜絲絲 (*tian2 si1 si1* = sweet-silk-thread-silk-thread = heart sweetly/pleasantly tugged/tickled).

by Diana Yue