

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 baths and showers

抹

Putonghua pronunciation: *ma1, mo3, mo4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *moot3*

Meanings: wipe, erase, efface, obliterate, swipe, coat over

抹 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) pronounced *ma1* means wipe. Towels are for 抹臉 (*ma1 lian4* = wiping-face), 抹身 (*ma1 shen1* = wiping/drying-body), handkerchiefs for 抹淚 (*ma1 lei4* = wipingaway-tears) with handkerchief. Cleaner 抹窗 (*ma1 chuang1* = wipes/cleans-windows) with 抹布 (*ma1 bu4* = wiping-cloth/rag).

揩抹 (*kai1 mo3* = rub~wipe) = wife/coat/slash/swipe. 塗脂抹粉 (*tu2 zhi1 mo3 fen3* = smudge-rouge-coat-powder) describes woman/cosmetician applying make-up or propagandist glossing over faulty issue, opposite of 抹黑 (*mo3 hei1* = coat-black = blacken/demonize). 抹頸自殺 (*mo3 jing3 zi4 sha1* = wipe-neck-self-kill) = slash one's own throat with knife and commit suicide. 轉彎抹角 (*zhuan3 wan1 mo4 jiao3* = turn-bend-press-corner) describes fast car turning bends or speaker beating about the bush.

by Diana Yue