

# 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 scandals

Putonghua pronunciation: *tuó4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *teuh3, to3, toh3*

Meaning: spit, saliva, spurn

唾 (radical 口 *kou3*, mouth) means noun 唾液 (*tuó4 ye* = spit-liquid = spit/saliva), verb 唾棄 (*tuó4 cui4* = spit-spit-out). 唾盂 (*tuó4 yǔ2* = spit-bowl = spittoons) are for 吐痰 (*tu4 tan2* = spitting-phlegm). Untalented writer 拾人餘唾 (*shí2 rén2 yǔ2 tuó4* = picks-up-other-people's-leftover-saliva = says what others have already said).

唾手可得 (*tuó4 shǒu3 kě3 dé2* = spit-on-hands-can-obtain) means spitting 唾沫 (*tuó4 mò4* = saliva-drops) on one's own hands, describes something very easy to obtain/accomplish.

Fans 唾罵 (*tuó4 mà4* = spit-on/spurn-rebuke/revile), 唾棄 (*tuó4 qì4* = spit-on/spurn-desert/abandon) singer involved in 醜聞 (*chǒu3 wēn2* = ugly-news = dirty scandal), but he 唾面自乾 (*tuó4 miàn4 zì4 gān1* = spat-on-face-self-dry = swallows rebuke/insult shamelessly without responding/reacting).

by Diana Yue