

Character Builder 您好學？

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 eyes

Putonghua pronunciation: *kan4*
Cantonese pronunciation: *hon1*
Meaning: see, look, watch

看 (radical 目 *mu4*, eye) means 看到 (*kan4 dao4* = see-reach = see). Blind man 看不見 (*kan4 bu4 jian4* = look-no-see = can't see). Poet 看海 (*kan4 hai3* = looks/stares-at-the-sea). Dog 看門 (*kan4 men2* = watches/guards-door/entrance).

Scholar 看書 (*kan4 shu1* = look-book = reads), develops 看法 (*kan4 fa3* = look-method = opinions/views). 看病 (*kan4 bing4* = see-illness) describes doctor examining/treating patient or friend visiting patient. 看護 (*kan4 hu4* = watch-protect) = nurse.

Boy 看上 (*kan4 shang4* = has-eyes-on) 好看 (*hao3 kan4* = good/pretty-looking) girl. 向前看 (*xiang4 qian2 kan4* = towards-front-look) = look ahead. Principled person 看不起 (*kan4 bu4 qi3* = look-no-up = belittles/despises) 向錢看 (*xiang4 qian2 kan4* = towards-money-look/aim = mercenary) people/attitude.

by Diana Yue