

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 Chinese painting



Putonghua pronunciation: *bi 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bat 1*

Meanings: write, pen, strokes, brush, brushstroke

Artist holds 毛筆 (*mao2 bi3* = hair~pen/brush = brush) vertically, dips its tip into heavy/diluted 墨 (*mo4* = black ink), then draws/paints. 筆墨 (*bi3 mo4* = brush~ink) = painter's style of applying brushstrokes and ink shades.

筆法 (*bi2 fa3* = brush~method) = method/style of applying brushstrokes. 吳帶當風 (*Wu2 dai4 dang1 feng1* = Wu's~belts~ resemble~facing~wind), 曹衣出水 (*Cao2 yi1 chu1 shui3* = Cao's garments~resemble~emerging~from~water) describe two ancient masters' style of painting garment-clad human bodies, like Leonardo's. Landscape painters use 皴法 (*cun1 fa3* = hill~surface~method = groupings of dots/strokes depicting distant hills/rocks/vegetation).

Audubon painted birds in 工筆 (*gong1 bi3* = fine/detailed~brushwork). 齊白石 (*Qi2 Bai2-shi2*) painted shrimps in 意筆 (*yi4 bi3* = idea/feeling~brush = free simple brushstrokes showing simplified shapes).

by Diana Yue