

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 lovely sky

Putonghua pronunciation: *xia2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ha4*

Meanings: glowing clouds, color of sunlight

霞 (radical 雨 *yü3*, rain) means 彩霞 (*cai3 xia2* = colorful-glow of clouds). 朝陽 (*zhao1 yang2* = morning~sun) radiates 朝霞 (*zhao1 xia2* = morning-glow). 夕陽 (*xi2 yang2* = evening~sun) radiates 晚霞 (*wan3 xia2* = evening-glow).

燦若雲霞 (*chan4 ruo4 yü2 xia2* = radiant-as~clouds-glowing-clouds) describes woman's radiant visage. 一抹紅霞 (*yì mo4 hong2 xia2* = one~swipe~red~glow) describes pink blush on girl's face.

Famous lines “落霞與孤鶩齊飛 (*luo4 xia2 yü3 gu1 wu4 qi2 fei1* = descending~clouds~and~lonely~duck~together~fly”, “秋水共長天一色 (*qiu1 shui3 gong4 chang2 tian1 yi1 se1* = autumn~ water~with~long~sky~one~color)” describe autumn scenery: “A lone bird flies in the evening glow; the river merges into the sky, sharing its color.”

by Diana Yue