

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



radical 黑 *hei1* = black

Putonghua pronunciation: *mo 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mak 6*

Meanings: ink

墨 means ink, also extent/level of someone's reading/education. 胸無點墨 (*xiong1 wu2 dian3 mo4* = chest-hasn't-dot-of-ink) = poorly read/educated. 滿肚墨水 (*man3 du4 mo4 shui3* = full-stomach-ink~solution) = well-read/erudite.

Artists compose 水墨畫 (*shui3 mo4 hua4* = water-ink~painting) in 焦墨 (*jiao1 mo4* = charred-ink = near-solid black ink), 濃墨 (*nong2 mo4* = dense-ink-solution), 淡墨 (*dan4 mo4* = pale/thin-ink-solution), 潑墨 (*po1 mo4* = splash-ink = ink splashes). Water-and-ink painting, although monochrome, is not monotonous, because “墨有五彩” (*mo4 you3 wu2 cai3* = ink~has~five-hues = ink displays various iridescent shades).

Essayists/poets 舞文弄墨 (*wu3 wen2 nong4 mo4* = dance/wave-words~play-ink = practice/show-off literary skills). Museums display 墨寶 (*mo4 bao3* = ink~treasures = calligraphy/painting/handwriting by famous artists/celebrities).