

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 children

Putonghua pronunciation: *ku 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *huk 1*

Meanings: cry, weep

Character 哭 shows two eyes dropping 眼淚 (*yan3 lei4* = eye's~tear). Penitent 痛哭 (*tong4 ku1* = pain-cry = cries/weeps ruefully). Spanked child 大哭 (*da4 ku1* = big-cry = cries loudly); given candy, 破涕為笑 (*po4 ti4 wei2 xiao4* = breaks-tears~becomes-laugh = turns from crying to smiling/laughing).

Babies 啼哭 (*ti2 ku1* = chirp/crow~cry = wail-cry). 哭哭啼啼 (*ku1 ku1 ti2 ti2* = cry-cry~wail-wail) describes cry-baby/crying nuisance. Person made fun of 哭笑不得 (*ku1 xiao4 bu4 de2* = cry~laugh-not-have = can't cry/frown, can't smile = shows embarrassed expression).

Mourners 哭泣 (*ku1 qi4* = cry~weep/sob). 貓哭老鼠假慈悲 (*mao1 ku1 lao2 shu3 jia3 ci2 bei1* = cat~cries/mourns~old~mouse~false/pretend~kind~mercy): “Cat’s shedding tears for Mouse? His grief/pity is sheer pretense!”

by Diana Yue