

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: *hong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung4*

Meanings: rainbow

Ideogram 虹 shows 虫 (*chong2*, worm) plus 工 (*gong1*, finely-crafted) = beautiful dragon/arched shape. When 雨過天青 (*yü3 guo4 tian1 qing1* = rain~pass~sky~blue = rain-washed blue sky appears), 天虹 (*tian1 hong2* = sky~arc/rainbow) appears. Hence English “rainbow”, French “arc du ciel” (literally “arc of/in sky”).

彩虹 (*cai3 hong2* = colorful-rainbow) has seven colors: 紅 (*hong2*, red), 橙 (*cheng3*, orange), 黃 (*huang2*, yellow), 綠 (*lü4*, green), 青 (*qing1*, blue), 藍 (*lan2*, indigo), 紫 (*zi3*, violet). 霓虹燈 (*ni2 hong2 deng1* = glowing-cloud-rainbow-lamp) = “neon”-transliterated lights. 虹橋 (*hong2 qiao2* = rainbow~bridge) is traditional-style arched wooden bridge.

氣勢如虹 (*qi4 shi4 ru2 hong2* = energy~force~resemble~ rainbow) describes highly-spirited advancing army/team. 劍氣如虹 (*jian4 qi4 ru2 hong2* = sword~energy~resemble-rainbow) describes dashing swordsman wielding sword/epee.

by Diana Yue