

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 narcissism



Putonghua pronunciation: *mei 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mei 5*

Meanings: good, fine, beautiful, beauty

美 = lovely/fine: 美食 (*mei3 shi2* = fine/gourmet-food), 美玉 (*mei3 yu4* = fine/precious-jade), 美夢 (*mei3 meng4* = lovely/enchanting-dream). 美好 (*mei2 hao3* = lovely-good) describes things appreciated/promising: life's 美好日子 (*mei2 hao3 ri4 zi0* = lovely-good-days-diminutive = happy days), youngster's 美好前程 (*mei2 hao3 qian2 cheng2* = lovely-good-ahead-journey = promising future).

真 (*zhen1*, truth), 善 (*shan4*, goodness), 美 (beauty) are standards for judging people/actions. 美男子 (*mei3 nan2 zi0* = handsome-man). 美人 (*mei3 ren2* = beautiful-person) = 美女 (*mei2 nu3* = beautiful-woman). 美事 (*mei3 shi4* = lovely-event) = good/heart-lifting outcome e.g. couple's union/reunion, enemies' reconciliation.

Women 愛美 (*ai4 mei3* = love-beauty = desire beautiful looks), visit 美容院 (*mei3 rong2 yuan4* = beauty-visage-house = beauty parlor).

by Diana Yue