

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 feeling miserable

哀

Putonghua pronunciation: *ai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *oi1*

Meanings: grief, pity, sorrow, mourn, bereavement, lamentation

哀 = 悲哀 (*bei1 ai1* = sad-grieved) = 哀傷 (*ai1 shang1* = grieved-hurt) = grieved. 哀求 (*ai1 qiu2* = sad-beg) = beseech desperately. Exiled poet 哀嘆 (*ai1 tan4* = mournfully~sighs), sings 哀歌 (*ai1 ge1* = tragic-song). 哀樂中年 (*ai1 le4 zhong1 nian2* = sadness~joys~middle-years) = middle-ager's bitter-sweet reflections.

Rescuers 哀憐 (*ai1 lian2* = lament~pity) famine victims. Country 哀悼 (*ai1 dao4* = lament~mourn) hero's death. “哀希臘” (*ai1 Xi1 La4* = mourn-“Greece”-transliterated) is Chinese title of Lord Byron's poem The Isles of Greece.

哀樂 (*ai1 yue4* = sad/mourning~music) accompanies funeral. Friends 致哀 (*zhi4 ai1* = convey~grief/condolences), console widow: “節哀順變!” (*jie2 ai1 shun4 bian4* = control~sorrow~follow/accept~change = “Get over it, look ahead.”)

by Diana Yue