

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 eyes

淚

Putonghua pronunciation: *lei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lui6*

Meaning: tear, tear-drop

淚 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 眼淚 (*yan3 lei4* = eyes'-tears): 落淚 (*luo4 lei4* = drop-tears) = 流淚 (*liu2 lei4* = flow-tears = cry/weep), 淚珠 (*lei4 zhu1* = tear-pearl/bead = tear-drops), 抹淚 (*mao4 lei4* = wipe-tears), 燭淚 (*zhu1 lei4* = candle-tears) = molten wax dripping from burning candle.

淚腺 (*lei4 xian4* = tear-glands) produce 淚水 (*lei4 shui3* = tear-water = tears). 淚如雨下 (*lei4 ru2 yu3 xia4* = tear-resemble-rain-down) = flooded with tears.

Prostitute 背人垂淚 (*bei4 ren2 chui2 lei4* = back-towards-people-drop-tears = weeps behind others' backs). Friend sheds 同情之淚 (*tong2 qing2 zhi1 lei4* = same-feeling-'s-tears = tears of compassion). Hypocrite sheds 鱷魚淚 (*er4 yu2 lei4* = crocodile tears).