

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 wheat-planting

Putonghua pronunciation: *mao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mak6*

Meanings: wheat

麥 includes 小麥 (*xiao3 mai4* = little-wheat = 麥子 *mai4 zi0* = wheat~diminutive = wheat), 大麥 (*da4 mai4* = big-wheat = barley), 黑麥 (*hei1 mai4* = black-wheat = rye). 《麥田捕手》 (*mai4 tian2 bu4 shou3* = rye~field~catch~hand) is Chinese name of Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye*.

麵粉 (*mian4 fen3* = wheat~powder = wheat-flour) makes dough for 饅頭 (*man4 tou2* = bun~head = hemispherical buns), 餃子 (*jiao3 zi0* = boiled/shallow-fried crescent-shaped dumplings). 麥麩 (*mai4 fu1* = wheat-bran), 大麥茶 (*da4 mai4 cha2* = big-wheat/barley~tea = roasted barley tea) are health foods.

啤酒節 (*pi2 jiu3 jie2* = beer~wine/alcohol-festival = October Fest) celebrates wheat harvest. 麥穗 (*mai4 sui4* = wheat~ear) is symbol of plenty.