

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 looking pretty



Putonghua pronunciation: *fa4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *faat3*

Meanings: hair on the head

美容 (*mei3 rong2* = beautify~visage = cosmetology) includes 美髮 (*mei3 fa3* = beautify~hair = hair~treatment/design), 剪髮 (*jian2 fa3* = scissors/cut~hair = haircut), 洗髮 (*xi3 fa3* = wash/shampoo~hair), 染髮 (*ran3 fa3* = dye/color~hair).

理髮師 (*li3 fa3 shi1* = treat~hair~master = barber/hairdresser) wields 梳子 (*shu1 zi0* = comb~diminutive), shapes 鬈髮 (*quan1 fa3* = curly~hair), 辮子 (*bian1 zi0* = pigtail). 高髻 (*gao1 ji4* = high-hair-bun) is classical-style coiffure. 削髮 (*xue1 fa3* = cut/ shave-off~hair) = monk/nun's tonsure. 假髮 (*ji3 fa3* = false~hair) = wig. 怒髮衝冠 (*nu4 fa3 chong1 guan1* = angry~hair~rush/raise~hat) describes angry man's hair standing on end. Poetic image 白髮三千丈 (*bai2 fa3 san1 qian1 zhang4* = white~hair~three~thousand~yards) invokes worry-laden man's hoary visage.