

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 rice-planting



Putonghua pronunciation: *mi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mai5*

Meanings: de-husked raw rice-grain

Character 米 resembles grain-crop: 大米 (*da4 mi3* = big-rice = rice), 小米 (*xiao3 mi3* = small-rice = millet). When 禾熟 (*he2 shou2* = grain-crops-ripen), peasants 收割 (*shou1 ge1* = collect-cut = reap harvest). 打穀 (*da3 gu3* = beat-husk-coated-rice-grain = thrashing) removes 糠 (*kang1*, husks).

白米 (*bai2 mi3* = white-rice = de-husked rice-grains) boiled produce 飯 (*fan4*, cooked rice). Sake is 米酒 (*mi3 jiu3* = rice-wine). 魚米之鄉 (*yu2 mi3 zhi1 xiang1* = fish-rice-~s-country/home) means region with rich agricultural/rice/fish produce.

吃飯 (*chi1 fan4* = eat-rice) means taking meal, getting fed. Losing 飯碗 (*fan4 wan3* = rice-bowl = income-fetching job), we'll 餓飯 (*e4 fan4* = hunger-rice = go hungry), even 要飯 (*yao4 fan4* = want/ask-rice = go begging).