

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 the tastes

甜

Putonghua pronunciation: *tian* 2

Meanings: sweet

甜 = 甘甜 (*gan tian* 12 = tasty~sweet) describes 蜂蜜 (*feng mi* 14 = bees-honey), 巧克力 (*qiao ke li* 314 = “chocolate”-transliterated). 嗜甜 (*shi tian* 42 = likes~sweet) = means having a sweet tooth.

甜 means sweet/endearing/enjoyable: 甜心 (*tian xin* 21 = sweet-heart = darling), 甜睡 (*tian shui* 24 = sweet/sound-sleep). Girl kissed by boy feels 甜絲絲 (*tian si si* 211 = sweet~filament~filament). Stock-market investors get bold after tasting 甜頭 (*tian tou* 22 = sweet~tip/head = goodies/gains).

甘之如飴 (*gan zhi ru yi* 1122 = taste-relish~it~like~candy) means willingly accepting/doing an unpleasant thing/task. PRC government asks people to 憶苦思甜 (*yi ku si tian* 1312 = remember~bitterness~think/reflect~sweet = remember country's tragic history, treasure today's achievements).