

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 humidity



(radical 雨 *yu3* = rain)

Putonghua pronunciation: *mei2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mooi4*

Meanings: mildew, mold, moldy, unlucky, bad luck

Biologically, 真菌 (*zhen1 jun1* = real~fungus = fungi) are divided into 蕈菌 (*tan2 jun1* = mushroom~fungus = mushrooms), 霉菌 (*mei2 jun1* = molds~fungus = molds), 酵母菌 (*jiao4 mu3 jun1* = ferment~mother~fungus = yeast).

Molds' 孢子 (*bao1 zi0* = spores) 繁殖 (*fan2 zhi2* = multiply~form~colony = multiply) fast, causing 污染 (*wu1 ran3* = dirt~stain = pollution) in food/clothes. In 霉雨 (*mei2 yu3* = moldy~rain = spring-summer rains) season, unrefrigerated meat/vegetables 霉爛 (*mei2 lan4* = mold-break/rot = rot/decay) easily.

Car crash victim laments 霉運 (*mei3 yun4* = mold~fortune = bad luck): “我真倒霉!” (*wo3 zhen1 dao3 mei2* = I~really~pour-down~mold = “I’m really unlucky!”) 發霉 (*fa1 mei2* = develop~molds) describes moldy objects or person idling miserably.