

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 autumn

謝

Putonghua pronunciation: *xie4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *je6*

Meanings: wither, decline, wane, thank

謝 means thank: 謝謝! (*xie4 xie0* = Thanks!) 謝幕 (*xie4 mo4* = thank~curtain) = performer taking curtain calls.

謝 also means wither. Grasses/trees 枯萎 (*ku1 wei3* = dry-up~wilt). Flowers 凋謝 (*diao1 xie4* = wane~wither). 花開花謝 (*hua1 kai1 hua1 xie4* = flowers~open/bloom~flowers~wither) laments nature/plants' wax and wane. 老成凋謝 (*lao3 cheng2 diao1 xie4* = old~mature~wane~wither) describes passing away of old people's lives/influence.

Scientific term 代謝 (*dai4 xie4* = generation~wither) = 新陳代謝 (*xin1 chen2 dai4 xie4* = new~old/stale~generation~wither) = metabolism. 分解代謝 (*fen1 jie3 dai4 xie4* = partition~disintegrate~generation~wither = catabolism) breaks down organic matter to obtain energy. 合成代謝 (*he2 cheng2 dai4 xie4* = combine~form~generation~wither = anabolism) uses energy to build cells.

by Diana Yue