

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 spring weather

Putonghua pronunciation: *shī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sap1*

Meanings: wet, damp, humid

濕 (radical 氵 = 水 *shuǐ3*, water) means damp/humid: 濕潤 (*shī1 run4* = damp/moist) weather, 濕度 (*shī1 du4* = damp~degree = humidity), 濕地 (*shī1 dì2* = wet~lands). Rain-soaked person is 濕透 (*shī1 tou4* = wet-through). 抽濕機 (*chou1 shī1 jī1* = suck~wet-machine) = dehumidifier.

潮濕 (*chao2 shī1* = damp~wet) spring weather is called 回南 (*hui2 nan2* = return~south = return of south-wind/damp-air). 濕氣重 (*shī1 qì4 zhong4* = damp~breath-heavy = damp) environments cause 風濕 (*feng1 shī1* = wind-damp = rheumatism). Drinking 涼茶 (*liang2 cha2* = cool-tea = Chinese herbal concoction) suppresses body's 濕熱 (*shī1 rē4* = damp~heat). 濕吻 (*shī1 wen3* = wet-kiss) = French kiss. Cantonese term 鹹濕 (*haam4 sap1* = Pinyin xian2 shī1) describes lewd/horny thoughts/actions/men.

by Diana Yue