

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 mass shootings

倒

Putonghua pronunciation: *dao3, dao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do, do3*

Meanings: fall, tumble, topple, pour, reverse, inverted

倒 (*dao4*) means reversed/up-side-down: 倒運 (*dao4 yün4* = reversed~fortune = ill-luck/unlucky), 除夕倒數 (*chu2 xi1 dao4 shu3* = change~night~reverse~count = New Year's Eve count-down).

倒 (*dao3*) means fall/drop/down: 倒下 (*dao3 xia4* = fall~down), 跌倒 (*die1 dao3* = trip/fall-down). Waitress 倒茶 (*dao3 cha2* = down~tea = pours tea). Drunks 醉倒 (*zui4 dao3* = get-drunk~collapse), 東歪西倒 (*dong1 wai1 xi1 dao3* = east~bend~west~drop = fall over in all directions).

Soldiers open fire, victims 應聲倒地 (*ying4 sheng1 dao3 di4* = echo~sound~fall~ground = as guns sound, drop to the ground). Rebels cry: “打倒 (*da3 dao3* = beat-down = Down with) dictator!” 兵敗如山倒 (*bing1 bai4 ru2 shan1 dao3* = armies~ defeated~resemble~mountains~fall) = big defeat with domino effect.

by Diana Yue