

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 political parties

敗

Putonghua pronunciation: *bai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baai6*

Meanings: weaken, undermine, harm, overcome, defeat

Transitive verb 敗 = 敗壞 (*bai4 huai4* = weaken-harm). Bad son 敗家 (*bai4 jia1* = weaken/harm~family = squanders family fortune, ruins family's reputation). Winner 打敗 (*da3 bai4* = beat~defeat = overcomes) opponent.

Intransitive verb 敗 = 失敗 (*shi1 bai4* = loss~defeat/failure). 一敗塗地 (*yi1 bai4 tu2 di4* = one~defeat-messy~ground) describes utterly failed attempt/action. In China's Civil War (1946-49), 國民黨 (*guo2 min2 dang3* = state~people~party = Nationalist Party) 吃敗仗 (*chi1 bai4 zhang4* = eat-fail~battle = lost battle), 兵敗如山倒 (*bing1 bai4 ru2 shan1 dao3* = army~defeat~ resemble-mountain-collapse = suffered wave of lop-sided military defeats).

鬥敗的公雞 (*dou4 bai4 de0 gong1 ji1* = combat-defeated~s~male-chicken = rooster defeated in cock-fight) describes downtrodden person's shaken, upset look.

by Diana Yue