

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

赦

Putonghua pronunciation: *she4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *se3*

Meanings: pardon, spare from punishment

赦 means 赦免 (*she4 mian3* = pardon~spare), where 免 (*mian3*) means exempt/spare from: 免費 (*mian3 fei4* = exempt~fares = free-of-charge) tickets, 免稅 (*mian3 shui4* = exempt~tax = tax-free) haven. Illegal immigrants wait for 大赦 (*da4 she4* = big/large-scale~pardon = amnesty).

Benevolent ruler 寬恕 (*kuan1 shu4* = broad/generous~forgive = forgives) rebels, issues 特赦令 (*te4 she4 ling4* = special-pardon-order = special pardon) to political prisoners. Harsh ruler says: “殺無赦!” (*sha1 wu2 she4* = “Kill them off! No pardon!”)

Mass-shooting gunman 犯罪 (*fan4 zui4* = commits~crime/sin), pleads authorities to 赦罪 (*she4 zui4* = pardon~crime = grant pardon). Verdict rules: “罪無可赦!” (*zui4 wu2 ke3 she4* = crime~none~can~spare = “This crime is unpardonable!”)

by Diana Yue