

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 senile dementia

呆 (= 𡇗)

Putonghua pronunciation: *dai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daai1*

Meaning: stagnant, inactive, stupid, dumb, slow, rigid, idiotic, deranged

呆 (radical 口 *kou3*, mouth) = dumb/slow. 呆子 (*dai1 zi0* = dumb-guy = fool/idiot) 呆頭呆腦 (*dai1 tou2 dai1 nao3* = stupid-head-stupid-brain = looks real dumb). 書呆子 (*shu1 dai1 zi0* = book-dumb-guy = bookworms) 呆板 (*dai1 ban3* = are un-smart-rigid). Verb 呆 means inactive: 呆在家 (*dai1 zai4 jia1* = stay/idle-around-at-home).

老人痴呆症 (*lao3 ren2 chi1 dai1 zheng4* = old-people-deranged-dumb-illness = senile dementia) patients 目光呆滯 (*mu4 guang1 dai1 zhi4* = eyes-light-dumb-slow = look dumbly at people/things), 說話呆笨 (*shuo1 hua4 dai1 ben4* = talk-speak-unintelligently-clumsily).

Boss shouts: "Don't be 呆若木雞 (*dai1 ruo4 mu4 ji1* = dumb-resemble-wooden-cock/hen): Don't just stand there like a dummy!" Employee 嚇呆了 (*xia1 dai1 le0* = is-scared-stiff!)

by Diana Yue