

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 Los Angeles

散

Putonghua pronunciation: *san3, san4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saan2, saan3*

Meanings: free, loose, disperse, sprawled out, random, scattered, undisciplined

Verb 散 (*san4*, radical 支 *po1*, lightly beat) = 散開 (*san4 kai1* = disperse-scatter): 散學 (*san4 xue2* = finish~school), 散會 (*san4 hui4* = adjourn~meeting). Adjective 散 (*san3*) = 鬆散 (*song1 san3* = loosely~disjointedly organized).

In 洛杉磯 (*luo4 san1 ji1* = “Los Angeles”-transliterated), communities 分散 (*fen1 san4* = apart~loose = are sprawled out), family members 散居各處 (*san3 ju1 ge4 chu4* = separately~live-in~various~spots). Tourists 散步 (*san4 bu4* = random/leisurely~walk) on beaches, imagine 自由散漫 (*zi4 you2 san1 man4* = self-free~loose~free-flow = free/uninhibited/undisciplined) lifestyle.

Roads may appear 一盤散沙 (*yi1 pan2 san3 sha1* = one~bowl-of~loose~sand = poorly connected), but electronic media 散播訊息 (*san4 bo4 xun4 xi1* = disperse~broadcast~message~news = spread information) at great speed.

by Diana Yue