

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 senile dementia

Putonghua pronunciation: **wang4**

Cantonese pronunciation: **mong4**

Meaning: forget, oblivious, give up

忘 (亡 **wang2**, die + 心 **xin1**, heart) means 忘記 (**wang4 ji2** = forget-to-remember = forget), 忘掉 (**wang4 diao0** = forget--ed = forgotten). 過目不忘 (**guo4 mu4 bu4 wang4** = pass-eyes-no-forget) describes people with photographic memory. 忘恩負義 (**wang4 en1 fu4 yi4** = forget-favors-betray-kindness) describes ungrateful people.

Public servant 公爾忘私 (**gong1 er3 wang4 si1** = public/office-and-forget-private = puts duties before private life). Lottery-winner 忘形 (**wang4 xing2** = forgets-appearances = forgets all manners), yells like crazy.

Ex-husband cannot 忘懷 (**wang4 huai2** = forget-heart/feelings for) ex-wife. Pianist 忘我 (**wang4 wo3** = forget-self = is completely absorbed), plays non-stop. Patients having 失憶症 (**shi1 yi1 zheng4** = lose-memory-illness = dementia) 忘卻 (**wang4 que4** = forget-reject) everything.

by Diana Yue