

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *diu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *diu1*

Meaning: lose, drop, throw, leave, mislay, misplace

丢 = 丢失 (*diu1 shi1* = drop-lose = lose/abandon/misplace). Careless people 弄丢 (*nong4 diu1* = make-lose = lose/mislay) keys/pens. Unfaithful husband 丢下 (*diu1 xia4* = leaves-drops/abandons) wife. Lazy pianist's skills 丢荒 (*diu1 huang1* = leave-untended/wasted = go rusty).

Out-of-favor employee 丢职 (*diu1 zhi2* = loses-post), 丢面子 (*diu1 mian4 zi0* = lose-face-diminutive = 丢脸 *diu1 lian3* = loses-face). Friend advises: 丢掉幻想 (*diu1 diao4 huan4 xiang3* = throw-away-delusion-thoughts = Drop fantasies!) 丢开烦恼 (*diu1 kai1 fan2 nao3* = Throw/put-aside-worries-miseries!)

Dementia patient 丢了钱 (*diu1 le0 qian2* = lost-money), 丢了证件 (*diu1 le0 zheng4 jian4* = lost-evidence-item = lost IDs), luckily didn't 丢了命 (*diu1 le0 ming4* = lose-life = get killed).

by Diana Yue