

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 Ebola

脱

Putonghua pronunciation: *tuō1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tuēt3*

Meaning: drop, strip, lose, escape, remove

脱 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat) = remove: 脱髮 (*tuō1 fa3* = lose-hair), 脱毛 (*tuō1 mao2* = remove-body-hair), 脱皮 (*tuō1 pi2* = peeling-of-skin). 脱水 (*tuō1 shuǐ3* = remove/lose-water) = dehydrated.

Strip-teaser 脱衣 (*tuō1 yī1* = takes-off-clothes), 脱光 (*tuō1 guāng1* = strips-herself-bare). Apartment 脱手 (*tuō1 shǒu3* = leave-hands = is sold), owner cashes out. Spy 脱身 (*tuō1 shēn1* = disengage-body = escapes/slips away), 脱離 (*tuō1 lí2* = disengage-leave = drops) enemy's surveillance.

Healed patients 脱險 (*tuō1 xiǎn3* = escape-danger). Disease-stricken country successfully 脱貧 (*tuō1 pín2* = quit-poverty = overcomes state of poverty), 擺脫 (*bǎi3 tuō1* = swing-free = drops) tear-jerking image, 脱胎換骨 (*tuō1 tāi huàn4 gǔ3* = leave-embryo-change-bones = is completely reborn).

by Diana Yue