

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 hungry stomach

渴

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hot3*

Meaning: thirsty, yearn for

渴 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) means 口渴 (*kou3 ke3* = mouth-thirsty = thirst). Traveller crossing desert must 喝水 (*he1 shui3* = drinking-water) to 止渴 (*zhi3 ke3* = stop-thirst), 解渴 (*jie3 ke3* = relieve-thirst), otherwise may 渴壞 (*ke3 huai4* = thirsty-bad/ruined = be badly hurt by thirst), 渴死 (*ke3 si3* = thirst-die = die of thirst).

Famished person feels 饑渴 (*ji1 ke3* = hunger-and-thirst). 饑渴慕義 (*ji1 ke3 mu4 yi4* = hungry-thirst-adore-righteousness) = hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Widow feeling 性饑渴 (*xing4 ji1 ke3* = sexually-hungry-thirsty = unsatiated sexual desires) 渴望 (*ke3 wang4* = thirst-hope = yearns to) re-marry. 臨渴掘井 (*lin2 ke2 jue2 jing3* = upon-thirst-dig-well) means making belated efforts to solve problem.

by Diana Yue