

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 conversion to Buddhism

散

Putonghua pronunciation: *san3, san4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saan2, saan3*

Meanings: loosen, split, scatter, irregular, disorganized, fragmentary

Adjective 散 (*san3*) means loose/fragmentary: 散亂 (*san3 luan4* = loose~confused) = untidy/disorganized). 一盤散沙 (*yi1 pan2 san3 sha1* = a~tray-of~loose~sand) describes loosely/poorly-organized group/society.

Verb 散 (*san4*) means loosen/scatter. Flowers 散發 (*san4 fa1* = dispense~emit) fragrance. 散步 (*san4 bu4* = loose~walk) = take a walk/stroll. After 散會 (*san4 hui4* = scatter~meeting = meeting ends), members 散去 (*san4 qu4* = scatter~away = leave).

Partners 散伙 (*san4 huo3* = loosen~companion = break up), lament 聚散無常 (*ju4 san4 wu2 chang2* = assemble~disperse~no~ always = People come and go, cannot stick together forever). 散盡家財 (*san4 jin4 jia1 cai2* = scatter~exhaust~family~ wealth = losing everything), 妻離子散 (*qi1 li2 zi3 san4* = wife~departs~son~disperse = wife and kids' departure/desertion) are family tragedies.

by Diana Yue