

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 humidity

(radical 氵 = 水 *shui3* = water)

Putonghua pronunciation: *shī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sap1*

Meanings: wet, damp

Character 濕 has seven dots — a lot of water! Tropical regions are 多雨 (*duo1 yu3* = much~rain = rainy). Plants thrive in 濕潤 (*shī1 run4* = wet~nourish = damp/moist, growth-fostering) weather. Birds flock to 濕地公園 (*shī1 di2 gong1 yuan2* = wet~land~public~garden = wetland natural parks).

Tear-jerker makes movie-goers 眼濕濕 (*yan3 shī1 shī1* = eyes~wet~wet = tearful). In places with high 相對濕度 (*xiang1 dui4 shī1 du4* = mutual~compare~damp~degree = relative humidity), 抽濕機 (*chou1 shī1 ji1* = draw-out~moisture~machine = dehumidifiers) are essential.

濕 is a Chinese medicinal term. Rheumatism's Chinese name is 風濕 (*feng1 shī1* = wind~damp). Chinese medicine says 食療 (*shī2 liao2* = eat~cure = food/diet therapy) can counter-balance body's 濕熱 (*shī1 ri4* = damp~heat).