

Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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 Alzheimer's disease

失

Putonghua pronunciation: *shī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sat1*

Meaning: lose, loss, lost

失 (radical 大 *da4*, big) means 失去 (*shī qù4* = lost-gone): 失明 (*shī míng2* = lose-light/eyesight = blind), 失聰 (*shī cōng1* = lose-hearing = deaf), 失業 (*shī yè4* = lose-job).

Unfortunate woman 失貞 (*shī zhēn1* = lose-virginity), 失婚 (*shī hūn1* = lose-marriage = is divorced/abandoned). Career 失敗 (*shī bài4* = lose-defeated = failure) incurs financial 損失 (*sūn3 shī1* = damages-losses).

失智 (*shī zhī4* = lose-intelligence = dementia) patient shows signs of 思覺失調 (*sī jué2 shī tiào2* = thoughts-senses-lose-balance = early psychosis), behaves 失常 (*shī chāng2* = lose-usual = oddly/abnormally), may 失禁 (*shī jìn4* = lose-constraint = cannot control bowels/bladder discharge), 失憶 (*shī yì1* = lose-memory), 失蹤 (*shī zōng1* = lose-tracks = get lost).

by Diana Yue