

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 the Olympic Games

失

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sat1*

Meanings: lose, loss, err, error, fail, failure

失 = 失去 (*shi1 qu4* = lost-gone): 失敗 (*shi1 bai4* = lost~defeated), 失業 (*shi1 ye4* = lose~occupation = unemployed), 失戀 (*shi1 lian4* = lose~love = dumped by lover). Businessman suffered 金錢損失 (*jin1 qian2 sun3 shi1* = gold~money~harm~loss = monetary loss) because partner 失信 (*shi1 xin4* = failed/broke~promise).

Archer 患得患失 (*huan4 de2 huan4 shi1* = worry~gain~worry~loss = loses confidence), 失手 (*shi1 shou3* = lose~hand/grip = misses mark/target). Team's 失常 (*shi1 chang2* = lose~normal = unusually/abnormally poor) performance makes fans 失望 (*shi1 wang4* = lose~hope = disappointed).

無心之失 (*wu2 xin1 zhi1 shi1* = no~heart/intention~'s~error = careless mistake) makes athlete 痛失金牌 (*tong4 shi1 jin1 pai2* = pain~lose~gold~plate/tablet = tragically lose gold medal).