

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 winter past-times

Putonghua pronunciation: *xüe3*
Cantonese pronunciation: *suet3*
Meaning: snow, snow-white

雪 (radical 雨 *yü3*, rain) = snow: 下雪 (*xia4 xüe3* = down/fall-snow = snowing), 雪雨 (*xüe3 yü3* = snow-rain = sleet), 雪景 (*xüe3 jing3* = snowy-scenery), 雪白 (*xüe3 bai2* = snow-white). 雪豹 (*xüe3 bao4* = snow-leopards) inhabit 雪山 (*xüe3 shan1* = snow-capped-mountains/peaks).

In Chinese lunar calendar, solar terms 小雪 (*xiao1 xüe3* = minor-snow, 22nd November), 大雪 (*da4 xüe3* = major-snow, 7th December) mark winter's approach.

雪花 (*xüe3 hua1* = snow-flower) = snowflakes. Kids 堆雪人 (*dui1 xüe3 ren2* = pile/make-snow-men), 擲雪球 (*zhi4 xüe3 qiu2* = throw-snow-balls), 滑雪 (*hua2 xüe3* = slide-snow) = skiing. In 冰天雪地 (*bing1 tian1 xüe3 di4* = ice-sky-snow-land = snowy/frozen outdoors), beware 雪崩 (*xüe3 beng1* = snow-collapse = avalanches).