

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

壞

Putonghua pronunciation: *huai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *waai6*

Meanings: bad, deteriorate, rot

壞 means bad: 壞人 (*huai4 ren2* = bad/cruel/evil~people), 壞書 (*huai4 shu1* = problematic/poorly-written~book), 壞主意 (*huai4 zhu3 yi4* = bad~main~meaning = bad/stupid/malicious~idea). Thugs/crooks are 壞蛋 (*huai4 dan4* = bad/rotten~egg). Gossipers 說壞話 (*shuo1 huai4 hua4* = say~bad~words) about others.

Verb 壞 means deteriorate/malfunction. Dead body 腐壞 (*fu4 huai4* = rot~turn-bad = decays). 壞車 (*huai4 che1* = stalled~car) needs fixing. Neglected teenager may 變壞 (*bian4 huai4* = change-to~bad = go on the wrong path). Wrong move may 壞事 (*huai4 shi4* = spoil~thing = fuck up plan).

Wound causes 細胞壞死 (*xi4 bao1 huai4 si3* = small-cell-bad-die = cells' premature death = necrosis). Son's infamous behavior 敗壞家聲 (*bai4 huai4 jia1 sheng1* = defeat~deteriorate~family~sound = stains/destroys family's reputation).

by Diana Yue