

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 washing



Putonghua pronunciation: *wu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wool1*

Meanings: dirt, dirty, stain, smear

Character 污 has radical 氵 (= 水, *shui3* = water): 污水 (*wu1 shui3* = dirty~water), 污漬 (*wu1 zi4* = dirty~stains). Slanderer uses 污言穢語 (*wu1 yan2 hui4 yu3* = dirty~words~dirty~speech) to 污辱 (*wu1 ru3* = dirt~insult = smear) opponent.

血污 (*xue3 wu1* = blood-dirt = messy blood stains) cover murder-victim's body. 污染 (*wu1 ran3* = dirt~stain) = pollute/pollution. Factories pay 排污費 (*pai2 wu1 fei4* = expel-dirt-fee = sewage charge).

貪污 (*tan1 wu1* = greed~dirty) = corruption. Greedy parties 同流合污 (*tong2 liu2 he2 wu1* = same-flow/river~combine~dirty/corrupt = collude to commit illegal acts). 出污泥而不染 (*chu1 wu1 ni2 er2 bu4 ran3* = emerge~dirty~soil~and~not~stained) praises virtuous/righteous persons unstained by their lowly/shady origin.