

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 relatives

疏

Putonghua pronunciation: *shu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *soh1*

Meaning: separate, sparse, infrequent, neglect, clear, dredge

疏 (radical 梳 *shu1*, comb-teeth) means separate/loose/dispel: 疏落 (*shu1 luo4* = apart-few = scanty) stars/passengers, 疏懶 (*shu1 lan3* = undisciplined-lazy) person. 百密一疏 (*bai2 mi4 yi1 shu1* = hundred-close-knit-one-omission) means single/fatal 疏忽 (*shu1 hu1* = careless-omission) in otherwise flawless plan/action.

Canals 疏導 (*shu1 dao3* = disperse-channel/re-direct) flood-water. 疏通 (*shu1 tong1* = dredge-through) means clearing pipes/traffic or paying bribes. Police 疏散 (*shu1 san4* = disperse-evacuate) crowds. 親疏有別 (*qin1 shu1 you3 bie2* = close/dear-distant/apart-has-difference) is selfish mentality favoring kin/buddies against outsiders. Snob 疏遠 (*shu1 yuan3* = apart-distance = distances himself from) loser. 天網恢恢, 疏而不漏 (*tian1 wang3 hui1 hui1, shu1 er2 bu4 lou4* = heaven's-net-wide-wide, loose-but-won't-drop/omit) means fate never lets wrongdoers escape unpunished.

by Diana Yue