

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 bio-chemical weapons

Putonghua pronunciation: **du2**

Cantonese pronunciation: **duk6**

Meanings: poison, toxin, toxic, cruel, harmful, vicious, evil

毒 (radical 母 **mu3**, mother) means poisonous/malignant: 毒蛇 (**du2 she2** = poisonous-snake), 毒藥 (**du2 yao4** = poisonous-drug), 毒瘤 (**du2 liu2** = poisonous/malignant-tumor = cancer). Nuclear waste 有毒 (**you3 du2** = has/is-poisonous//toxic). 排毒 (**pai2 du2** = eject-poison) = detox.

毒販 (**du2 fan4** = poisonous-drugs-traffickers) sell 毒品 (**du2 pin3** = poisonous-things = poisonous drugs). 吸毒 (**xi1 du2** = inhaling/taking-drugs) 毒害 (**du2 hai4** = poisons-harms) nervous system.

下毒手 (**xia4 du2 shou3** = down/strike-poisonous-hand) = take vicious/cruel action. Using bio-chemical weapons is 惡毒 (**e4 du2** = vicious-poisonous/evil). 毒菌 (**du2 jun1** = poisonous-germs), 毒劑 (**du2 ji1** = poisonous-solutions = toxins), 毒氣 (**du2 qi4** = poisonous-gases), 毒粉 (**du2 fen3** = poisonous-powders) 可毒死 (**du2 si3** = poisons-to-death) thousands.

by Diana Yue