

Character Builder 您好學？

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 hope

失

Putonghua pronunciation: *shī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sat1*

Meaning: lose, err, neglect, fail, lost

失 means 失去 (*shī qū4* = lose/lost-gone), 過失 (*guo4 shī1* = mistake-loss = mistake/fault): 失明 (*shī1 míng2* = lose-brightness = go blind), 失手 (*shī1 shǒu3* = err-hand = flop attempt), 失業 (*shī1 yè4* = lose-profession = unemployed), 失言 (*shī1 yán2* = lose/err-words = carelessly making inappropriate/offensive remark) is 失禮 (*shī1 lǐ3* = lose-rituals/manners = rude).

Lad who 失戀 (*shī1 lián4* = lose-love = gets dumped by lover) 失魂落魄 (*shī1 hún2 luò4 pò4* = lose-soul-drop-spirit = loses heart/appetite for everything). Woman 失足 (*shī1 zú1* = lose- foothold = fall/sin): 失身 (*shī1 shēn1* = loses-body/chastity) to seducer.

Businessman who 失信 (*shī1 xìn4* = lose-fidelity/trust = doesn't keep promise) makes partner 失望 (*shī1 wàng4* = lose-hope = disappointed).

by Diana Yue