

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 history

事

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *si6*

Meanings: occurrence, happening, thing, event, act

事 = occurrence: 史事 (*shi3 shi4* = historical-events), 事實 (*shi4 shi2* = occurrence~solid/real = facts), 事情 (*shi4 qing2* = occurrences~circumstances = happenings/engagements). 辦喜事 (*ban4 xi3 shi4* = arrange~happy~event = hosting wedding), 喪事 (*sang1 shi4* = loss/death~event = funeral) are 大事 (*da4 shi4* = big/important~events/matters).

做好事 (*zuo4 hao3 shi4* = do/make~good~things) = doing good. 出事 (*chu1 shi4* = come-out~thing) means something bad has happened, e.g. accident/stroke. Acting rashly 壞事 (*huai4 shi4* = bad/spoil~thing = ruins plans).

Biographies describe 真人真事 (*zhen1 ren2 zhen1 shi4* = real~people~real-events). Japan attacked China in 九一八事件 (*jiu3 yi1 ba1 shi4 jian4* = nine~one~eight~happening~piece = Mukden/Manchurian Incident, 18 September 1931). 戰事 (*zhan4 shi4* = war~happenings) = war-time fighting.

by Diana Yue