

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 winter clothes

洗

Putonghua pronunciation: *xi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sai2*

Meanings: wash, cleanse

洗 (radical 冫 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 洗淨 (*xi3 jing4* = wash-clean): 洗臉 (*xi3 lian3* = wash-face), 洗手 (*xi3 shou3* = wash-hands), 洗澡 (*xi3 zao3* = wash-bath = take bath/shower), 洗菜 (*xi3 cai4* = wash-vegetables = wash cooking ingredients), 洗碗 (*xi3 wan3* = wash-bowls = wash used dishes).

Robbers 洗劫 (*xi3 jie2* = wash-rob = rob/clean out) bank. Mafia 洗錢 (*xi3 qian2* = wash-money = launder money). Christian priest performs 洗禮 (*xi3 li3* = wash-ceremony = baby's christening or new convert's baptism).

Housewife uses 洗衣機 (*xi3 yi ji1* = wash-clothes-machine = washer). Woollen clothes need 乾洗 (*gan1 xi3* = dry-cleaning). 自助洗衣房 (*zi4 zhu4 xi3 yi fang2* = self-help-wash-clothes-room) = self-service laundry (Laundromat/laundrette).