

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 heat waves

(radical 日 *ri4*, sun)

Putonghua pronunciation: *shu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sue2*

Meanings: hot weather, summer heat

寒暑 (*han2 shu3* = cold-hot) = temperature range. 寒暑表 (*han2 shu3 biao3* = cold-hot-measure) = thermometer.

In Chinese calendar's 二十四節氣 (*er4 shi2 si4 jie2 qi4* = two-ten-four-season-weather = twenty-four solar terms), 小暑 (*xiao2 shu3* = minor-heat), appr. 7 July, is day when heat starts becoming unbearable, 大暑 (*da4 shu3* = major-heat), appr. 23 July, is day when heat reaches year's most powerful point.

In 暑天 (*shu3 tian1* = heat-sky/days = dog days), 暑氣 (*shu3 qi4* = hot-weather-energy/effect) rises, we 放暑假 (*fang4 shu3 jia4* = relieve-summer-vacation = take summer leave), drink herbal drinks to 解暑 (*jie3 shu3* = dissolve/counteract-the-heat), swarm to 避暑勝地 (*bi4 shu3 sheng4 di4* = avoid-heat-win-place = nice summer retreats).