

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 missing persons

失

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sat1*

Meanings: lose, loss, lost

失 = 失去 (*shi1 qu4* = lose-away = lose). 失明 (*shi1 ming2* = lose~brightness/sight) = blind. 失職 (*shi1 zhi2* = fail~post) = commit faults in work. 失業 (*shi1 ye4* = lose~job) = unemployed. 失婚 (*shi1 hun1* = lose~marriage) = is dumped by spouse.

失敗 (*shi1 bai4* = lose~defeated = defeats/failures) make people 失望 (*shi1 wang4* = lose~hope = feel disappointed), 失意 (*shi1 yi4* = lose~sentiment = dejected), 失常 (*shi1 chang2* = lose~ normal = go out of their minds).

In wartime families/friends 失散 (*shi1 san4* = lose~disperse = are scattered). 失蹤人口 (*shi1 zong1 ren2 kou3* = lose~track~person~mouth = lost/missing persons) include many 失足少女 (*shi1 zu2 shao4 nu3* = lose~foothold~young~girl = girls lured into prostitution).