

# 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:

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 funerals

死

Putonghua pronunciation: *si3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sei2*

Meaning: die, death, dead, extremely, stubborn, rigid

死 (radical 歹 *dai3*, bad/evil) means 死亡 (*si3 wang2* = die-death): 病死 (*bing4 si3* = sick-die = die of illness), 跌死 (*die1 si3* = fall-to-death), 死屍 (*si3 shi1* = dead-corpse). Predator 殺死 (*sha1 si3* = kill-die = kills) prey. 死士 (*si3 shi4* = die-soldier) = man on death mission.

Husband's infidelity makes wife 氣死 (*qi4 si3* = gas/angry-die = extremely annoyed/angry). Lottery-winner 樂死 (*le2 si3* = happy-die = is overjoyed). However, 安樂死 (*an1 le4 si3* = comfortably-cheerfully-die) means euthanasia/mercy-killing.

Operation 起死回生 (*qi3 si3 hui2 sheng1* = raises-the-dead-back-to-life). Patient 死不去 (*si3 bu4 qu4* = die-no-go = escapes death). Indeed, 生死有命 (*sheng1 si3 you3 ming4* = life-death-have-fate = life and death are fixed/pre-determined)!

by Diana Yue