

Character Builder 您好學? 好

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 circuses

雜

Putonghua pronunciation: *za2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jaap6*

Meanings: lesser, impure, miscellaneous, mixed, crisscrossed

雜 (radical 衣 *yī*, clothes) means mixed: 雜務 (*za2 wu4* = various-chores), 雜質 (*za2 zhi2* = mixed-quality = impurities), 複雜 (*fu1 za2* = complex-complicated), 雜牌軍 (*za2 pai2 jun1* = mixed-brand-army) = variously-sourced, inferior team.

雜貨店 (*za2 huo4 dian4* = miscellaneous-goods-store) sells 雜物 (*za2 wu4* = miscellaneous-things), 雜誌 (*za2 zhi4* = miscellaneous-record = magazines). Chinatown sells 雜碎 (*za2 sui4* = mixed-chopped = chop-suey), 牛雜 (*niu2 za2* = cow's- offals), 雜交 (*za2 jiao1* = mix-cross) means biological hybridization or sexual promiscuity. 雜種 (*za2 zhong3* = cross/promiscuous-seed) = hybrids/bastards.

Performing 雜技 (*za2 ji4* = mixed-skills = 雜耍 (*za3 sha3* = mixed-play = clown's tricks/acrobatics) requires 心無雜念 (*xin1 wu2 za2 nian4* = heart-no-mixed-thoughts = absolute concentration).

by Diana Yue