

# 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 nuclear leakage

泄

Putonghua pronunciation: *xie3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sit3*

Meanings: leak, vent

泄 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 泄露 (*xie3 lu4* = leak~reveal). Dams 泄洪 (*xie3 hong2* = leak~flood-water = release amassed flood water). 水泄不通 (*shui3 xie3 bu4 tong1* = water-leak~no-through) describes traffic jams. Losers 泄氣 (*xie3 qi4* = leak~gas/air = deflate = lose spirit/morale). Pent-up energy/anger/grief need 發泄 (*fa1 xie3* = emit-leak = venting). Rioters throw stones to 泄憤 (*xie3 fen4* = vent~anger).

春光乍泄 (*chun1 guang1 zha4 xie3* = spring~light~sudden~leak) describes unintended exposure of woman's under-parts or couple having sex. Men are frustrated by 泄精 (*xie3 jing1* = leak~sperm/semen), 早泄 (*zao3 xie3* = early~leak = premature ejaculation).

Wikileaks 泄密 (*xie3 mi4* = leak~secrets). 核洩漏 (*he2 xie3 lou4* = nuclear-leak~drop) = nuclear leakage.

by Diana Yue