

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 humidity

潮

(radical 氵 = 水 *shui3* = water)

Putonghua pronunciation: *chao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chiu4*

Meanings: tide, humid, damp, moist, wet

潮 = 潮水 (*chao2 shui3* = tidal~water/current): 高潮 (*gao1 chao2* = high~tide = climax/elation/orgasm), 低潮 (*di1 chao2* = low~tide = depression/trough). Fashion-seekers follow 潮流 (*chao2 liu2* = tide~flow = trends). 心事如潮 (*xin1 shi4 ru2 chao2* = heart's~things/ events~resemble~tide) describes surging thoughts/ feelings/memories.

潮 = 潮濕 (*chao2 shi1* = damp~humid). Biscuits which 潮了 (*chao2 le0* = damp~ed) are soggy. 濕氣 (*shi1 qi4* = damp~gas/ air = humidity) spoils electronic appliances, breeds 霉菌 (*mei2 jun1* = molds~fungus). Clothes in chests/closets need 防潮珠 (*fang2 chao2 ji1* = prevent~moisture~bead = mothballs).

移民潮 (*yi2 min2 chao2* = move~people~tide) = wave of immigration/emigration. Truffaut, Godard are French 新浪潮 (*xin1 lang4 chao2* = new~wave~tide = French Nouvelle Vague = New Wave) film-makers.

by Diana Yue