

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 partying

散

Putonghua pronunciation: *san 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saan 3*

Meanings: disperse

Adjective 散 (*san3*) means loose: 散髮 (*san3 fa3* = disheveled/loosened hair). Verb 散 (*san4*) means loosen/disband/disperse. Crowds/odors 散去 (*san4 qu4* = disperse/go-away). Gossipers 散播 (*san4 bo4* = disperse~spread/broadcast) rumors. 散步 (*san4 bu4* = loosen/relax/random~steps) = take a walk. 魂飛魄散 (*hun2 fei1 po4 san4* = soul-fly~spirit~disperse) describes someone scared out of his wits.

散局 (*san4 ju2* = disperse~gathering/game) means party's break-up or "Game's over!" 酒闌人散 (*jiu3 lan2 ren2 san4* = wine/ banquet/party~finished~people~leave) arouses sad/empty feeling. Trips help us 散心 (*san4 xin1* = loosen/free~heart = take mind off melancholy/worries).

Friends fix date, promise "不見不散!" (no~see~no~go-away = "Will definitely turn up!") After robbery, criminals "散水" (Cantonese *saan3 sui2* = disperse~water = scam/skip town).

by Diana Yue