

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 manipulating stockmarkets



Putonghua pronunciation: e4

Cantonese pronunciation: ngok6

Meanings: crocodile, alligator, caiman

Chinese call crocodiles 鱷 (radical 魚 *yü2*, fish), 鱷魚 (*e4 yü2* = crocodile~fish). Actually crocs are 爬行動物 (*pa2 xing2 dong4 wu4* = crawl-walk~moving~thing = reptiles). 長吻鱷 (*chang2 wen3 e4* = long~muzzle~croc) = crocodile, 短吻鱷 (*duan3 wen3 e4* = short~muzzle~croc) = alligator.

Women love 鱷魚皮手袋 (*e4 yü2 pi2 shou3 dai4* = crocodile~skin~hand~bags). Chinese use 鱷魚肉 (*e4 yü2 rou4* = crocodile~meat) in medicine and soups.

Crocodiles are 食肉獸 (*shi2 rou4 shou4* = eat~meat~animal = carnivores), hence Hongkong terms 大鱷 (*da4 e4* = big~croc = powerful/ruthless speculator), 鱷魚潭 (*e4 yü2 tan2* = croc~pool = dangerous investment/gambling place that swallows losers alive while winners shed 鱷魚淚 *e4 yü2 lei4* = crocodile~tears).