

# 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 dolphins

海

Putonghua pronunciation: *hai3*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *hoi2*  
Meanings: sea, ocean

海 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 海洋 (*hai3 yang2* = sea-ocean), 海疆 (*hai3 jiang1* = sea-territory) = country's maritime territory. 海納百川 (*hai3 na4 bai2 chuan1* = sea-accepts-hundred-rivers) describes great thinking embracing all views/knowledge.

In “老人與海” (*lao3 ren2 yü3 hai3* = old-person-and-sea = The Old Man And The Sea), 海明威 (*hai3 ming2 wei1* = “Hemingway”-transliterated) described 海景 (*hai3 jing3* = sea-view = seascapes), 海鳥 (*hai3 niao3* = sea-birds), 海豚 (*hai3 tun2* = sea-pig = dolphins).

Many Chinese study/settle in 海外 (*hai3 wai4* = oceans-beyond = abroad). Those who return to China are called “海歸” (*hai3 gui1* = oceans-return, synonymous with “海龜” (*hai3 gui1* = sea-turtle)).

by Diana Yue