

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 dolphins

Putonghua pronunciation: *tun2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tuen4*

Meanings: pig, suckling pig, rat-like animal

豚 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat) means 豬 (*zhu1*, pig) or plump/squabby mammal. 豚鼠 (*tun2 shu3* = piglet-rat) = guinea pig. Japanese love 河豚 (*he2 tun2* = river-piglet = Japanese “fugu” = pufferfish/blowfish) sashimi.

海豚 (*hai2 tun2* = sea-pig = dolphins) and 鼠海豚 (*shu3 hai3 tun2* = rat-sea-pigs = porpoises) are 齒鯨 (*chi3 jing1* = toothed-whales) evolved from 哺乳類動物 (*bu4 ru3 lei4 dong4 wu4* = feed-milk-genre-moving-thing = mammals).

Dolphins/porpoises 群居 (*qun2 ju1* = group-live = live together) in schools/pods, have high 智力 (*zhi4 li4* = wise-strength = intelligence), use 呼嘯 (*hu1 xiao1* = exhale-soughing = whistling) and 歌聲 (*ge1 sheng1* = song-sound = singing) to 溝通 (*gou1 tong1* = gap-through = communicate).

by Diana Yue