

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 islands



Putonghua pronunciation: *dao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do2*

Meanings: island

島 (originally 鳥 *niao3*, birds + 山 *shan1*, mountain, i.e. sea-locked hill where migrating birds stay) = 海島 (*hai3 dao3* = sea-island = isle/island), 島嶼 (*dao3 yü3* = island-islet). 礁 (*jiao1*, reefs), 珊瑚島 (*shan1 hu2 dao3* = coral-island = atolls), 沙洲 (*sha1 zhou1* = sand-island = cays/keys) are 小島 (*xiao3 dao3* = small-islands).

島弧 (*dao3 hu2* = island-arc) is 群島 (*qun2 dao3* = group-of-islands = archipelago) spreading arc-shaped on 大陸架 (*da4 lu4 jia4* = big-land-shelf = continental shelf). 火山島 (*huo3 shan1 dao3* = fire-mountain-island) = volcanic island.

Myths say 孤島 (*gu1 dao3* = single/isolated-island) is 仙島 (*xian1 dao3* = fairy-island). 安全島 (an1 quan2 dao3 = safe-perfect-island) = safety island for pedestrians.