

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 好

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *yue4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeuk6*

Meanings: leap forward, jump forward, vault

躍 (radical 足 *zhu1*, foot) = 跳躍 (*tiao4 yue4* = jump-leap-forward). 飛躍 (*fei1 yue4* = fly-leap) describes rapid progress. 躍居首位 (*yue4 ju1 shou3 wei4* = leap-occupy-head-position) = rise/leap to head of list. China launched 大躍進 (*da4 yue4 jin4* = the Great Leap Forward) in 1950s.

Seeing attractive advertisement, people 躍躍欲試 (*yue4 yue4 yu4 shi4* = leap-leap-desire-try = are eager to try), 踴躍報名 (*yong3 yue4 bao4 ming2* = dance-leap-report-name = rush to apply).

Documentaries show 碧海藍天 (*bi3 hai3 lan2 tian1* = turquoise-sea-blue-sky), dolphins 衝浪 (*chong1 lang4* = dash-against-waves = surfing), 躍起 (*yue4 qi3* = jumping-up), 轉身 (*zhuan4 shen1* = turning/spinning-bodies), 翻筋斗 (*fan1 jin1 dou3* = turn-over-loop = doing somersaults).

by Diana Yue