

Character Builder

您好嗎? 呀

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

嬉

Putonghua pronunciation: *xi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei1*

Meanings: play, romp, have fun, frolic

嬉 (女 *nü3*, female + 喜 *xi3*, delight) = romp/play. Children 嬉笑 (*xi1 xiao4* = playfully-laugh), 嬉戲 (*xi1 xi4* = play-game = play cheerfully). 嬉春 (*xi1 chun1* = play-spring) describes people/animals/birds frolicking in springtime or boy-and-girl romantic chase.

Essayist 嬉笑怒罵 (*xi1 xiao4 nu4 ma4* = playfully-joke-angrily-accuse = make funny/sarcastic/angry/stern statements). 嬉皮笑臉 (*xi1 pi2 xiao4 lian3* = playful-skin-laughing-face) = superficially cheerful/flirtatious/nonchalant expression. 嬉皮士 (*xi1 pi2 shi4* = playful-skin-scholar) is Chinese transliteration of "hippy/hippies".

Dolphin-watch show dolphins 嬉戲 (*xi1 xi4* = romping-playing), 跳躍 (*tiao4 yue4* = jump-leap), 嬉鬧 (*xi1 nao4* = play/romp-make-noise/fight = play-fight), 躍過 (*yue4 guo4* = leap over) waves. Incoming ship welcomes dolphins 領航 (*ling3 hang2* = lead-sail = lead the way).

by Diana Yue