

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 fox borrinwg tiger's majesty



Putonghua pronunciation: *hu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo4*

Meanings: fox

狐 (radical 犴 = 犬 *qūan3*, dog) = 狐狸 (*hu2 li2* = fox-badger = fox). Foxes are 聰明 (*cong1 ming2* = sharp-eared-sharp-eyed = intelligent), 狡猾 (*jiao3 hua2* = sly-treacherous = cunning).

銀狐 (*yin2 hu2* = silver-foxes) have prized fur. In Chinese legends, 狐仙 (*hu2 xian1* = fox-fairies) appear as lovely women who use 狐媚 (*hu2 mei2* = foxy-charm/seduction) to lure/bewitch men. Modern term 狐狸精 (*hu2 li2 jing1* = fox~demon) means women who lure/snatch others' husbands.

Fox/thief 偷雞摸狗 (*tou1 ji1 mo1 gou3* = steal~chicken~touch~dog = steals/snatches small animals/things). Detective's 狐疑 (*hu2 yi2* = fox~suspicious = suspicion) makes undercover criminal 露出狐狸尾巴 (*lu4 chu1 hu2 li2 wei3 ba1* = shows~out~fox's~tail = expose bad/criminal intent/identify).