

Character Builder 您好學? 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 islands and atolls



Putonghua pronunciation: *dao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do2*

Meaning: island

島 (鳥 *niao3*, birds + 山 *shan1*, hill/mountain) means 海島 (*hai3 dao3* = sea-island = isle/island), 島嶼 (*dao3 yü3* = island-islet): 小島 (*xiao3 dao3* = small-islands), 島鍊 (*dao3 lian4* = island-chain), 群島 (*qün2 dao3* = group-of-islands = archipelago). 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). Britain is 島國 (*dao3 guo2* = island-countries), but poet John Donne says “人不是孤島” (*ren2 bu4 shi4 gu1 dao3* = person-not-is-isolated-island = “No man is an island”).

安全島 (*an1 quan2 dao3* = safe-perfect-island) = pedestrian island. Engineers build 人工島 (*ren2 gong1 dao3* = person-work-island = artificial/man-made islands).

by Diana Yue