

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 sheep and goats

Putonghua pronunciation: *mao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo4*

Meaning: hair, wool, fleece, down, small

毛 = hair/wool: 羽毛 (*yǔ3 mao2* = feather-hair = feathers), 體毛 (*ti3-mao2* = body-hair), 陰毛 (*yin1 mao2* = shaded/private-part-hair = pubic hair), 毛衣 (*mao2 yi1* = woolen-cardigan). 毛筆 (*mao2 bi3* = hair-pen) = Chinese writing/painting brush.

毛毛蟲 (*mao2 mao2 chong2* = hairy-hairy-worm) = caterpillar.
毛毛雨 (*mao2 mao2 yǔ3* = hair/small-hair/small-rain) means drizzle.
白毛風 (*bai2 mao2 feng1* = white-hair-wind) = snowy gale/windstorm.

Junior economist 嘴上無毛 (*zui3 shang4 wu2 mao2* = mouth-top-no-hair = is too young, can't even grow moustache), only has 皮毛 (*pi2 mao2* = skin-hair = superficial) knowledge, doesn't understand 羊毛出在羊身上 (*yang2 mao2 chu1 zai4 yang2 shen1 shang4* = sheep's-wool-comes-from-sheep's-body-surface = profit/gain is already annulled by the cost/loss).

by Diana Yue