

Character Builder

您好學？

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

群

Putonghua pronunciation: *qūn2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kwan4*

Meaning: crowd, group, herd, flock, fold, many

群 (radical 羊 *yang2*, sheep/goat) means group/flock: 群島 (*qūn2 dao3* = group-of-islands = archipelago), 人群 (*ren2 qūn2* = human-crowd), 族群 (*zu2 qūn2* = tribal/ethnic-group), 社群 (*she4 qūn2* = social-group). 群居 (*qūn2 jū1* = group-reside) = live together as cluster/group.

Dynasty topples, 群雄並起 (*qūn2 xiong2 bing4 qi3* = many-heroes-together-rise = contenders emerge), rally 群眾 (*qūn2 qun2 zong4* = group-crowd = the people/masses). 群魔亂舞 (*qūn2 mo2 luan4 wu3* = group/many-devils-confusedly-dance) describes evil-doers threatening society.

狼群 (*lang2 qūn2* = wolves-group = pack of wolves) attack 羊群 (*yang2 qūn2* = sheep/goat-group = flock), snatch 失群 (*shi1 qūn2* = lose-flock = lost) lamb, Maxim: Be 合群 (*he2 qūn2* = join-group = cooperative/sociable). Don't 離群 (*li2 qūn2* = leave-the-fold)!

by Diana Yue