

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 canines

狗

Putonghua pronunciation: *gou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gau2*

Meanings: dog

狗 (radical 犭 = 犬 *qūan3*, dog) include 野狗 (*ye3 gou3* = wild-dogs), 家犬 (*jia1 qūan3*, = domestic~dogs), 獵狗 (*lie4 gou3* = hunting~hounds), 警犬 (*jing3 qūan3* = police~dogs), 導盲犬 (*dao3 mang3 qūan3* = guide-blind-dog = seeing eye dogs).

公狗 (*gong1 gou3* = grandpa/male~dog) and 母狗 (*mu3 gou3* = mother/female-dog) produce 小狗 (*xiao3 gou3* = little~dogs/pups). Vets 閹狗 (*yan1 gou3* = spay/neuter~dogs).

狗 suggests contempt/derision. 走狗 (*zou3 gou3* = running~dog) = lackey. 狗屁不通 (*gou3 pi4 bu4 tong1* = dog-fart-not-reasonable) describes ill-founded/ridiculous arguments. 狗娘養的! (*gou3 niang2 yang3 de0* = dog-mother~raised) = You sonuvabitch! Shallow/contemptuous snobs 狗眼看人低 (*gou3 yan3 kan4 ren2 di1* = dog's~eyes-look-at~people-low = can't gauge/appreciate other people's full stature/merits).

by Diana Yue