

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *hu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo4*

Meanings: fox

狐 (radical 犭 = 犬 *quān3*, dog) = 狐狸 (*hu2 li2* = fox~badger = fox). Foxes are 狡猾 (*jiāo3 huá2* = sly~treacherous = sly/cunning), hence 狐疑 (*hu2 yí2* = fox-like~suspicious), 狐媚 (*hu2 mèi2* = fox-like~luring/seductive). 狐步 (*hu2 bù4* = fox~steps) = fox trot.

Chinese legends feature 狐仙 (*hu2 xiān1* = fox~fairies), hence 狐狸精 (*hu2 li2 jīng1* = fox~demons) means charmer snatching somebody else's husband. 狐群狗黨 (*hu2 qún2 gǒu3 dǎng3* = foxes~group~dogs~gang) = villain's evil/lawless associates. 露出狐狸尾巴 (*lù4 chū1 hu2 li2 wei3 ba1* = show~out~fox's~tail) describes villain's real evil intent leaked/exposed.

兔死狐悲 (*tù4 sǐ3 hu2 bēi1* = hare~dies~fox~grieves) describes tragic empathy: one victim's ruin is mourned by another anticipating similar fate.