

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 fishing

(radical 金 *jin1* = gold/metal)

Putonghua pronunciation: *diao 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *diu 3*

Meanings: hook, angle, fishing

釣魚 (*diao4 yu2* = hook~fish = angling) requires 釣竿 (*diao4 gan1* = angling~bamboo-rod = fishing rod), 釣絲 (*diao4 si1* = fishing~silk/thread = fishing line), 釣鉤 (*diao4 gou1* = fishing~hook/angle), 釣餌 (*diao4 er3* = fishing~lures/baits).

Hypocrites 沽名釣譽 (*gu1 ming2 diao4 yu4* = sell~name~angle~reputation = pay money to purchase honour/fame). 釣大魚 (*diao4 da4 yu2* = catch~big~fish) means game-fishing or con-men targeting big object. 上釣 (*shang4 diao4* = up~angle) means taking fisherman's/con-man's bait and getting hooked. 孤舟蓑笠翁 (*gu1 zhou1 suo1 li4 weng1* = single~skiff~cape-of~hay~old-man), 獨釣寒江雪 (*du2 diao4 han2 jiang1 xue3* = alone~angle/fish~cold~river~snow) are immortal lines in Chinese poetry describing an angler wearing a hay-raincoat fishing on a skiff in a snowing landscape.

by Diana Yue