

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 marine life



Putonghua pronunciation: *yu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *Yue3*

Meanings: fish

魚類 (*yu2 lei4* = fish-species) = all fish. Verb 漁 (radical water 氵 + 魚) means fishing. 釣魚 (*diao4 yu2* = catch-with-hook-fish = angling) requires 餌 (*er3*, bait), 漁竿 (*yu2 gan1* = fishing-rod).

漁民 (*yu2 min2* = fisher-men) use 拖網船 (*tuo1 wang3 chuan2* = drag-net-boats = trawlers) to catch 鱈魚 (*xue3 yu2* = cod-fish), 沙丁 (*sha1 ding1* = "sardine"-transliterated), 金槍魚 (*jin1 qiang1 yu2* = gold-spear-fish = tuna).

鯨 (*jing1*, whales), 鯊 (*sha1*, "shark"-transliterated), 殺人鯨 (*sha1 ren2 jing1* = kill-person-whale = killer-whales = orcas), 海豚 (*hai3 tun2* = sea-pig = dolphins) are spectacular animals. 大魚吃小魚 (*da4 yu2 chi1 xiao3 yu2* = big-fish-eat-small-fish) happens a lot in nature and the business world.

by Diana Yue