

# Character Builder

# 您好嗎? 呀

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:

- 1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4<sup>th</sup> 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 fish



Putonghua pronunciation: *yü2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue4*

Meanings: fish

魚 is radical in 鱈 (*xüe3*, cod), 鱸 (*lü2*, bass), 鰻 (*man4*, eel), 鯨 (*jing1*, whale), 鱈 (*xün2*, sturgeon) etc. 魚類 (*yü2 lei4* = fish-species) = all fish. Verb 漁 ( ; , water + 魚) means fishing. 釣魚 (*diao4 yü2* = dangle-line-hook-fish) = angling.

金魚 (*jin1 yü2* = gold-fish), 美人魚 (*mei3 ren2 yü2* = beautiful-person-fish = mermaids) inspire art/literature. Hemingway's old man fought/killed giant 馬林魚 (*ma3 lin2 yü2* = "mar-lin"-transliterated-fish = marlin).

Trawlers catch 金槍魚 (*jin1 qiang1 yü2* = gold-spear-fish = tuna). Drowned swimmer 葬身魚腹 (*zang4 shen1 yü2 fu1* = bury-body-in-fish's-stomach = is eaten by fish). 大魚吃小魚 (*da4 yü2 chi1 xiao3 yü2* = big-fish-eat-small-fish) is law of nature and business world.

by Diana Yue