

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 Hurricane Sandy

浪

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long6*

Meanings: wave, billow

浪 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = wave: 海浪 (*hai3 lang4* = sea-wave), 浪花 (*lang4 hua1* = wave-flower = foam), 浪尖 (*lang4 jian1* = wave-tip/crest), 浪潮 (*lang4 chao2* = waves-and-tides). 風平浪靜 (*feng1 ping2 lang4 jing4* = wind-calm-waves-quiet) = calm/uneventful situation.

Trouble-makers 興風作浪 (*qing1 feng1 zuo2 lang4* = raise-wind-make-waves = create gossip/enmity). 大風大浪 (*da4 feng1 da4 lang4* = big-wind-big-wave = tough challenges) make people mature/wise. Idiom 大浪淘沙 (*da4 lang4 tao2 sha1* = big-waves-rinse/sift-sand) describes patient/endsless trials/testings before decision/action.

Hurricane-hit coastline 浪高六米 (*lang4 gao1 liu4 mi3* = waves-high/reach-six-meters). 浪急風高 (*lang4 ji2 feng12 gao1* = waves-swift/beating-winds-high) makes ship's passengers 暈浪 (*yün1 lang4* = dizzy-waves = get sea-sick).

by Diana Yue