

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 tigers



Putonghua pronunciation: *hu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo2*

Meanings: tiger

獅 (*shi1*, lions) 虎, 豹 (*bao4*, leopards) are 貓科 (*mao1 ke1* = cat~category = felines). Tigers, reverently called “山君” (*shan1 jun1* = mountain~ruler/king), are loners: 一山不容二虎 (*yil shan1 bu4 rong2 er4 hu3* = one~mountain~no~allow~two~tigers = two tigers/leaders cannot co-exist in one mountain/territory).

Tigers are powerful/dangerous. 與虎謀皮 (*yu2 hu3 mou2 pi2* = with~tiger~contemplate~skin = asking a tiger for its skin) is naive; 放虎歸山 (*fang4 hu3 gui1 shan1* = release~tiger~return~mountain = setting free someone potentially dangerous) is unwise.

Husbands fear 雌老虎 (*ci2 lao2 hu3* = female~old/senior~tiger = fierce wives). Ministers/aides know 伴君如伴虎 (*ban4 jun1 ru2 ban4 hu3* = accompany~ruler~resembles~accompany~tiger = serving a tyrannical king/boss is a scary/dangerous thing).