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

軟
Putonghua pronunciation: ruan3
Cantonese pronunciation: yuen5
Meanings: soft


軟體動物 (ruan3 ti3 dong4 wu4 = soft-body-moving-things) = mollusks: 水母 (shui3 mu3 = water-mother = jellyfish), 墨魚 (mo4 yu2 = ink-fish = 烏賊, wu1 zei2 = grey-thief = squid/cuttlefish), 八爪魚 (ba1 zhao3 yu2 = eight-claws-fish = octopuses), 貝類 (bei4 lei4 = seashell-species e.g. clams, cowries).

Clam yields 珍珠 (zhen1 zhu1 = precious-pearls), is logo of 殼牌石油 (ke2 pai2 shi2 you2 = shell-brand-stone-oil = Shell Petroleum).

by Diana Yue