

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 felines

獅

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi1*
Cantonese pronunciation: *si1*
Meanings: lion

大貓 (*da4 mao1* = big~cats/felines) include 獅, 虎 (*hu3*, tigers), 豹 (*bao4*, leopards). 雄獅 (*xiong2 shi1* = male~lions), 母獅 (*mu3 shi1* = female~lionesses), 幼獅 (*you4 shi1* = young~lions/cubs) form 獅群 (*shi1 qun2* = lion~group = pack of lions).

獅 (radical 犴 = 犬 *qian3*, dog) symbolizes regality/ferocity/power, is 萬獸之王 (*wan4 shou4 zhi1 wang2* = ten-thousand~beasts~'s~king = king of beasts). 獅子搏兔 (*shi1 zi0 bo2 tu4* = lion~attacking~hare) describes big power striking/overwhelming weak power. 河東獅吼 (*he2 dong1 shi1 hou3* = river~east~lion~roars) = fierce wife's angry howl.

舞獅 (*wu3 shi1* = dance~lion) = lion dance, men's costumed kung-fu performance with percussion accompaniment. 獅子星座 (*shi1 zi0 xing1 zuo4* = lion~diminutive~constellation~seat) = zodiac sign Leo.