

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 fishing

Putonghua pronunciation: *shui 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sui 2*

Meanings: water

水 (氵 = water-drops) is radical for 海 (*hai1*, sea), 河 (*he2*, river), 湖 (*hu2*, lake), 泉 (*quan2*, spring), 溪 (*xi1*, stream), 池 (*chi2*, pond). 治水 (*zhi4 shui3* = govern/control-water) = control/eliminate flooding. Switzerland has beautiful 山水 (*shan1 shui3* = mountain-water = natural scenery).

Philosophers say “上善若水” (*shang4 shan4 ruo4 shui3* = the-highest-good-is-like-that-of-water). 水族 (*shui3 zu2* = water-tribe = water creatures e.g. fish, shrimps, crabs) thrive in 活水 (*huo2 shui3* = living-water), 流水 (*liu2 shui3* = flowing/running-water), not 死水 (*si2 shui3* = dead/stagnant-water).

Friends/lovers enjoy each other's presence 如魚得水 (*ru2 yu2 de2 shui3* = like-fish-having/in-water). 水清無魚 (*shui3 qing1 wu2 yu2* = water-clear/pure-has-no-fish) means clinically-clean or corruption-free environments cannot nurture robust activities/growth.