

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

海

Putonghua pronunciation: *hai3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hoi2*

Meanings: sea, ocean

海 breeds living things: 海上 (*hai3 shang4* = sea-on = on sea) are sea-birds, 海裡 (*hai3 li3* = sea-in = in sea) are fish, 海邊 (*hai3 bian1* = sea-edge = along coasts) are seals, in 海底 (*hai3 di3* = sea's~bottom), on 海床 (*hai3 chuang4* = sea-bed), are anemones/corals. Mythological figure 海龍王 (*hai3 long2 wang2* = Sea's~Dragon~King) rules all oceans.

China's 領海 (*ling2 hai3* = lead~sea = territorial sea) covers parts of 黃海 (*Huang2 Hai3* = Yellow~Sea), 東海 (*Dong1 Hai3* = east~sea = East China Sea), 南海 (*Nan2 Hai3* = south~sea = South China Sea).

海流 (*hai3 liu2* = ocean~currents) affect ocean's 溫度 (*wen1 du4* = warm~degree = temperatures), 生態 (*sheng1 tai4* = life~conditions/relations = ecology).