

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 fish

游

Putonghua pronunciation: *you2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuk6*

Meanings: swim, move, shift, drift

游 (radical 氵, water) means 游泳 (*you2 yong3* = swim~dive) = swim. 游魚 (*you2 yü2* = swimming~fish) eat 浮游生物 (*fu2 you2 sheng1 wu4* = float~swim~living~things = plankton). Warships 游弋 (*you2 yi4* = swim~shoot/speed = prowl/cruise) around disputed islands.

游牧民族 (*you2 mu4 min2 zu2* = roam~herd~people~tribe) = nomadic tribe. 游擊隊 (*you2 ji1 dui4* = move~hit~team) = guerrillas. 游資 (*you2 zi1* = floating~capital) disturbs market. Liar's 游移 (*you2 yi2* = drifting~shifting) glance betrays his dishonesty.

上游 (*shang4 you2* = up~stream), 中游 (*zhong1 you2* = mid~stream), 下游 (*xia4 you2* = down~stream) mean river's sections or industry's different production stages. 力爭上游 (*li4 zheng1 shang4 you2* = effort~compete~up~stream) describes person striving for higher status/achievements.