

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 hams

豬

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jue1*

Meanings: pig, hog

豬 lives in 豬圈 (*zhu1 quān1* = pig-ring/sty): 公豬 (*gong1 zhu1* = grandpa/male-pig = boar), 母豬 (*mu3 zhu1* = mother/female-pig = sow), 小豬 (*xiao3 zhu1* = little-pig/piglet).

Chinese eat 豬肉 (*zhu1 rou4* = pig~meat = pork), 豬肚 (*zhu1 du4* = pig's~stomach), 豬蹄 (*zhu1 ti2* = pig's~trotters). 豬油 (*zhu1 you2* = pig~oil) = lard. In Chinese New Year Hongkong people eat 豬舌 (*zhu1 she2* = Cantonese 豬脷 *zhu1 li4* = pig's tongue) for good luck because 脷 is synonymous with 利 (*li4*, profit/benefit). Wedding banquet features 燒豬 (*shao1 zhu1* = burn/roast~pig = whole roasted pig/piglet).

Cantonese 咁 (*gam2*) means “like this”. 殺豬咁叫 (Cantonese *saat3 jue1 gam2 giu3* = kill-pig-like-this-call/yell/scream) = screeching like a pig being slaughtered.

by Diana Yue