

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 job-hunting

薪

Putonghua pronunciation: *xin1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san1*

Meanings: firewood, salary, wages, pay

薪 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) originally means firewood. 薪火相傳 (*xin1 huo3 xiang4 chuan2* = firewood-fire~mutual~pass-on) describes passing on burning torches, i.e., keeping tradition/culture alive from generation to generation.

薪 now means wages/salary: 薪酬 (*xin1 chou2* = salary~reward), 薪金 (*xin1 jin1* = salary~gold/money), 薪水 (*xin1 shui3* = salary~water) all mean salary/pay. 杯水車薪 (*bei1 shui3 che1 xin1* = cup-of~water~cartload-of~firewood) means too little water for quenching a big fire, i.e. inadequate means/budget. 薪俸稅 (*xin1 feng4 shui4* = pay~salary~tax) = income tax.

Graduate seeks 高薪 (*gao1 xin1* = high~pay) job, e.g. 月薪 (*yue4 xin1* = monthly~salary) \$100,000, eventually takes 低薪 (*di1 xin1* = low~pay) job because it doesn't 欠薪 (*qian4 xin1* = owe~salary = delay pay).

by Diana Yue