

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.

This week: Words about education

生

Pronunciation: *sheng* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *saang* (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: student

生 basically means “beget”, “birth”. 學生 (*xue sheng* = study~begotten) means students: 小學生 (*xiao xue sheng* = little~school~pupils) in primary schools, 中學生 (*zhong xue sheng* = middle~school~students) in secondary schools, 大學生 (*da xue sheng* = big~school~students) in colleges/universities. 留學生 (*liu xue sheng* = stay~study~students) means students studying abroad.

Examination candidates are 考生 (*kao sheng* = examination~students). Graduates are 畢業生 (*bi ye sheng* = complete~studies~students). 舊生 (*jiu sheng* = once-time~students) means alumni. A scholar's intellectual protégés are his 門生 (*men sheng* = door~students = those embracing his school of teaching).

書生 (*shu sheng* = book~scholars) means those who know books (but little else). 小生 (*xiao sheng*) is the young scholar/man's role in operas/movies.

by Diana Yue