

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 vacation and retirement

Putonghua pronunciation: **song1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **sung1**

Meaning: relax, loose, loosen, lax, slacken, soften, flexible, puffy

鬆 (radical 髟 *biao1*, dangling hair) describes 輕鬆 (*qing1 song1* = light-easy) task, 鬆弛 (*song1 chi2* = loose-lapse = flabby) muscles, Chaplin's 鬆泡泡 (*song1 paol paol* = loose-puffy-puffy = roomy/baggy) pants. Old paint 鬆脫 (*song1 tuo1* = loosens-falls-off). Passenger adjusts seat-belt's 鬆緊 (*song1 jin3* = looseness-tightness).

School's 寬鬆 (*kuan1 song1* = broad-relaxed = loose) rules make students 鬆懈 (*song1 xie4* = slacken-lazy = un-alert/undisciplined). Banks 放鬆 (*fang4 song1* = loosen-relax = relax) loans, 銀根鬆動 (*yin2 gen1 song1 dong4* = silver/money-roots-relax-move = money markets are eased), businesses 鬆口氣 (*song1 kou3 qi4* = loosen-mouth-breath = heave sigh of relief). Retiree 鬆手 (*song1 shou3* = relax-hand = lets go), 鬆綁 (*song1 bang3* = is-released-from-ties/bondage).

by Diana Yue