

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 islands

保

Putonghua pronunciation: *bao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bo2*

Meanings: preserve, keep, guard, safeguard, protect, defend

保 (radical 亻 = 人 *ren2*, person) originally showed parent hugging baby. Mother-hen 保護 (*bao3 hu4* = keep~protect = protects) chicks. Heir 保存 (*bao3 cun2* = keep~remain = preserves) heirloom. 保健 (*bao3 jian4* = keep~healthy = health) program 保證 (*bao3 zheng4* = safeguard~prove = guarantees) client 保持 (*bao3 chi2* = preserve~hold = maintain) youthful looks.

Cars/houses need 保養 (*bao3 yang3* = keep~feed = maintenance). 保安員 (*bao3 an1 yuan2* = keep~safety~member = security guards) patrol grounds. Travelers buy 保險 (*bao3 xian3* = protect~risk = insurance) plans.

Students join 保釣運動 (*bao3 diao4 yun4 dong4* = defend~Diao~act~move = Defend Diaoyütai Movement), shout slogan “保衛釣魚台!” (*bao3 wei4 diao4 yu2 tai2* = keep~defend~angling~fish~terrace = “Defend Diaoyütai!”)

by Diana Yue