

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 photographers

攝

Putonghua pronunciation: *she4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sip3*

Meanings: attract, absorb, preserve, capture, maintain, assist, substitute

攝 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand/manual) means absorb/capture. Animals eat to 攝取 (*she4 qu3* = absorb~obtain) nourishment. Practicing Taiji helps 攝生 (*she4 sheng1* = maintain~life = maintain energy/vitality). 磁石 (*ci2 shi2* = magnet~stone = magnets) 攝鐵 (*she4 tie3* = attract~iron). 攝政王 (*she4 zheng4 wang2* = substitut~govern~king) = regent.

攝影 (*she4 ying3* = absorb/capture~shadow) = photography. 19th-century Chinese believed 攝影機 (*she4 ying3 ji1* = absorb~shadow~machine = cameras), like 狐仙 (*hu2 xian1* = fox-fairies), 勾魂攝魄 (*gou1 hun2 she4 po4* = hook~soul~capture~spirit = take away souls of humans).

Cam-corders 攝錄 (*she4 lu4* = capture~record) memorable scenes. 攝影師 (*she4 ying3 shi1* = absorb~shadow~master/technician = cameraman) helps film-maker 拍攝 (*pai1 she4* = pat/take~absorb = shoot) movies.