

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 kindergartens

護

Putonghua pronunciation: *hu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo6*

Meaning: protect, defend, guard, escort, shield, safeguard, patronize

護 (radical 言 *yan2*, words) = 保護 (*bao3 hu4* = preserve-protect): 護衛 (*hu4 wei4* = protect-defend = guard), 護士 (*hu4 shi4* = protect-person = nurse). Armor's 護心鏡 (*hu4 xin1 jing4* = protect-heart-mirror) is metal-plate protecting chest. Fairy gives god-daughter 護身符 (*hu4 shen1 fu2* = protect-body-charm). 護航 (*hu4 hang2* = protect-sailing) describes warships escorting carrier or supporters backing political motion. St. Patrick is Ireland's 護國聖人 (*hu4 guo2 sheng4 ren2* = protect-country-holy-man = patron saint). 護短 (*hu4 duan3* = protect-short/ fault) means unfairly defending/patronizing unjustified person/cause. 護苗基金 (*hu4 miao2 ji1 jin1* = protect-young-shoots-foundation-gold/money = foundation for children's well-being) funds kindergartens, advocates 愛護 (*ai4 hu4* = loving-protecting), 呵護 (*he1 hu4* = blow-air/coax-protect = tenderly protecting) toddlers.

by Diana Yue