

Character Builder 您好學？

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 self-improvement

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sau1*

Meaning: build, cultivate, improve, mend, repair, revise, study

修 (radical 攸 *shan1*, decorate) means build/mend/revise. Engineers 修路 (*xiu1 lu4* = mend/build-roads). Student 修讀 (*xiu1 du2* = improve-self-read = studies) Ph.D. Editor 修改 (*xiu1 gai3* = improves-corrects) essay.

修飾 (*xiu1 shi1* = repair-decorate) = adorn face/looks or polish writing/aesthetic style. Women 修身 (*xiu1 shen1* = trim-body = keep body fit/slim), 修甲 (*xiu1 jia3* = trim-nails). 修理 (*xiu1 li3* = repair-attend-to) means repair utensil or manhandle/punish someone. 修正主義 (*xiu1 zheng4 zu3 yi4* = revise-correct-principal-meaning) = revisionism.

Hermit 修行 (*xiu1 xing2* = improve-behavior = practices ascetic/moral exercises). Confucian sage's disciples 格物 (*ge2 wu4* = contend-matter = apply reason/analysis to things), 致知 (*zhi4 zhi1* = attain-knowledge), 修身 (*xiu1 shen1* = mend-body = cultivate strict personal morals).

by Diana Yue