

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 babies

護

Putonghua pronunciation: *hu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo6*

Meanings: protect, defend, guard, shield, safeguard, patronize

護 (radical 言 *yan2*, words) = 保護 (*bao3 hu4* = preserve/guarantee~protect = protect/protection): 護衛 (*hu4 wei4* = protect~defend = guard), 護林 (*hu4 lin2* = protect~forests), 救護車 (*jiu4 hu4 che1* = rescue~protect~car = ambulance), 保護國 (*bao3 hu4 guo2* = preserve~protect~country = protectorate).

Traveler needs 護照 (*hu4 zhao4* = protect~picture = passport). Socialite needs 護花使者 (*hu4 hua1 shi4 zhe1* = protect~flower~messenger = lady's escort). Demon-possessed person needs 護身符 (*hu4 shen1 fu2* = protect~body~charm/amulet).

護士 (*hu4 shi4* = protect~person = nurses) administer 護理 (*hu4 li3* = protect~treat = medical care/treatment). Parents 愛護 (*ai4 hu4* = love~protect), 呵護 (*he1 hu4* = blow-air/coax~protect = coax), sometimes 袒護 (*tan3 hu4* = bare/naked~protect = unfairly defend) their kids.

by Diana Yue