

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 leaders

帥

Putonghua pronunciation: *shuai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sui3*

Meaning: admiral, chief, leader, commander, handsome

帥 (radical 巾 *jin1*, kerchief) = 主帥 (*zhu3 shuai4* = chief/highest-commander). Emperor appoints hero to 掌帥印 (*zhang3 shuai4 yin4* = hold highest commander's seal), 帥兵 (*shuai4 bing1* = command-soldiers/military forces). In Chinese chess, chess-pieces 帥 (*shuai4*, admiral), 將 (*jiang4*, general) are commanders-in-chief of the two sides, equivalent to king in international chess.

CEO 統帥 (*tong3 shuai4* = overall-command = heads) company. Communist leaders debate whether 經濟掛帥 (*jing1 ji4 gua4 shuai4* = manage-irrigate/aid-elevate-commander = give economic considerations priority) or 政治掛帥 (*zheng4 zhi4 gua4 shuai4* = administer-rule-elevate-commander = give political considerations priority).

元帥 (*yuan2 shuai4* = principal-commander = admiral) is highest rank in Chinese army. However, 帥哥 (*shuai4 ge1* = commander-big-brother) flirtatiously means “handsome guy”.

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