The basic unit of the Chinese language is the 匯 (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each 匯 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 匯 together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about education

学 (xue) (Putonghua, 2nd tone), 晋 (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: learn, learning, branch of knowledge

The verb 学 = 学习 (xue xi = learn-practice) = learn, because studying requires practice. 学者 (xue zhe = learned-people) means scholars. 学佛 (xue fo = learn-Buddha) means studying/practicing Buddhism. 学做人 (xue zuo ren = learn-be-person/human) means learning about how to go through life.

The noun 学 = 学问 (xue wen = learn-ask) = learning, because learning involves enquiring. Traditional Chinese studies is 国学 (guo xue = national-studies) = what foreigners call 漢學 (Han xue = Han-studies = sinology). 物理学 (wu li xue = objects-principles-study) = physics. 神学 (shen xue = god-study) = theology.

学術 (xue shu = learning-method/art) = scholarship. 不学无术 (bu xue wu shu = no-learning-without-method/art) describes someone who has no substance.