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.

This week: Words about books

書 (shu) (Putonghua, 1st tone), 咪 (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: writing script, calligraphy, document, book

Verb 書 = 書寫 (shu xie = script-write = write): 書信 (shu xin = written-letters), 書法 (shu fa = writing-method/style = calligraphy), square-looking 楷書 (kai shu = model/regular script), highly-condensed, abstract-looking 草書 (cao shu = grass/cursive script).


上書 (shang shu = send-up-written-document) means submitting appeal/protest. The CCP’s 黨總書記 (dang zhong shu ji = party-chief-document-secretary = party general secretary) is 胡錦濤 (Hu Jin-tao).

by Diana Yue