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:

1\textsuperscript{st} tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2\textsuperscript{nd} tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3\textsuperscript{rd} tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4\textsuperscript{th} 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 photographers

Putonghua pronunciation: she4
Cantonese pronunciation: sip3
Meanings: attract, absorb, preserve, capture, maintain, assist, substitute

攝 (radical \(\text{扌} = \text{shou3}\), hand/manual) means absorb/capture. Animals eat to 摄取 (she4 qi3 = absorb-obtain) nourishment. Practicing Taiji helps 摄生 (she4 sheng1 = maintain-life = maintain energy/vitality). 磁石 (ci2 shi2 = magnet-stone = magnets 摄铁 (she4 tie3 = attract-iron). 摄政王 (she4 zheng4 wang2 = substitut-govern-king) = regent.

攝影 (she4 ying3 = absorb/capture-shadow) = photography. 19th-century Chinese believed 摄影机 (she4 ying3 ji1 = absorb-shadow-machine = cameras), like 狐仙 (hu2 xian1 = fox-fairies), 勾魂摄魄 (gou1 hun2 she4 po4 = hook-soul-capture-spirit = take away souls of humans).

Cam-corders 摄录 (she4 lu4 = capture-record) memorable scenes. 摄影师 (she4 ying3 shi1 = absorb-shadow-master/technician = cameraman) helps film-maker 拍摄 (pai1 she4 = pat/take-absorb = shoot) movies.

by Diana Yue