

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 passive waiting



Putonghua pronunciation: *shou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sau3*

Meanings: keep, guard, defend, preserve, wait

守 (roof over 寸 *cun4*, inch/rule) means 守候 (*shou3 hou4* = guard/watch-wait), 守衛 (*shou3 wei4* = defend/follow-guard), 守則 (*shou3 ze2* = keep-item = rule/regulation), 職守 (*zhi2 shou3* = post-duty), indicates attitude: 守法 (*shou3 fa3* = follow-law = law-abiding), 守信 (*shou3 xin4* = keep-promise), 守舊 (*shou3 jiu4* = defend/follow-old = conservative).

守夜 (*shou3 ye4* = wait-night) = night-watch, 守靈 (*shou3 ling2* = wait-soul) = wake/vigil for deceased, 守歲 (*shou3 sui4* = wait-year) = stay up/watch/witness New Year's Eve's passing.

Chaste/righteous person 守身如玉 (*shou3 shen1 ru2 yu4* = guard-body-resemble-jade = remains pure/uncorrupted). 守財奴 (*shou3 cai2 nu2* = guard-wealth-slave = miser) 守口如瓶 (*shou3 kou3 ru2 ping2* = guard-mouth-resemble-bottle = says nothing) about his money.

by Diana Yue