

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 cycling

Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saang2*

Meanings: save, economical

省 = 節省 (*jie2 sheng3* = tighten~save = economize): 省時 (*sheng3 shi2* = save~time = time-saving), 省力 (*sheng3 li4* = save~strength = strength/effort-saving). Editor 省略 (*sheng3 lue4* = economize~condense = cuts down) details.

Frugal people advocate 可省則省 (*ke2 sheng3 ze2 sheng3* = can~save~so~save = economize wherever possible). Chinese factory slogan says “多快好省” (*duo1 kuai4 hao3 sheng3* = plenty~fast~good~economical = “Aim at greater, faster, better-quality, cheaper production yields”).

Bicycle-parking 省空間 (*sheng3 kong1 jian1* = saves~empty~space). Cycling 上班 (*shang4 ban1* = up/mount~shift = to work), 下班 (*xia4 ban1* = down/leave~shift = from work) is 省錢 (*sheng3 qian2* = save~money = economical) and 節省能源 (*jie2 sheng3 neng2 yuan2* = tighten~save~energy~source = energy-saving).

by Diana Yue