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 World Expo

**擠**

Putonghua pronunciation: ji3
Cantonese pronunciation: jai1
Meanings: squeeze, cram


Adjective 擠 = 擠擁 ji3 yong1 = cram-embrace = crowded. 公路擠塞 gong1 lu4 ji3 sai1 = public-road-squeeze-jam = highway crowded) causes 堵車 du3 che1 = jam-car = traffic jam.

Visitors 擠滿 ji3 man3 = crowd-full = fill up) Shanghai Expo site. Police exercise 人群管理 ren2 qun2 guan3 li3 = person-crowd-control-arrange = crowd control. Visitors 排隊 pai2 dui4 = arrange-row = form queues) outside pavilions, 秩序井然 zhi4 xu4 jing3 ran2 = class-order-water-well-certainly = follow strict order, like wells neatly spaced out).

by Diana Yue