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 manipulating stockmarkets

Putonghua pronunciation: you2
Cantonese pronunciation: yau4
Meanings: move, drift, float, swim

游 (radical \ = 水 shui3, water) means 游泳 (you2 yong3 = move-swim = swim). 游’s near-equivalent 遊 (you2, radical \ = 舟 zhou1, boat) means move/travel.

Wanderers 遊蕩 (you2 dang4 = move-roam = loiter/drift aimlessly). 游手好閒 (you2 shou3 hao4 xian2 = swim-hand/arm-love~leisure) describes idler swaying his arms. Lobbyist 游說 (you2 shui4 = go-around-peddle-idea = invites/persuades) 游離份子 (you2 li2 fen4 zi0 = swim-away-part-diminutive = detached/estranged members) to re-join camp.

Fish 游動 (you2 dong4 = swim-move), eat 浮游生物 (fu2 you2 sheng1 wu4 = float-drift-living-things = plankton). 大鱷 (da4 e4 = big-croc = powerful-ruthless speculators) target 游資 (you3 zii1 = swim/drift-capital = floating capital = 熱錢 re4 qian2 = hot-money = short-term speculative capital).

by Diana Yue