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 fall colors

遍
Putonghua pronunciation: bian4
Cantonese pronunciation: pin3
Meaning: everywhere, widespread, common, general, round

一兩遍 (yi1 liang3 bian4 = one-two-rounds/times) = once or twice. Pianist practices piece 無數遍 (wu2 shu4 bian4 = no-number/count-times = endless times). Reporter 走遍天下 (zou3 bian4 tian1 xia4 = run-everywhere-sky-under = travels everywhere under the sun), 遍訪名人 (bian4 fang3 ming2 ren2 = everywhere-visit-famous-people = interviewed many VIPs).
Park 遍植楓樹 (bian4 zhi2 feng1 shu4 = is everywhere-plant-with-maple-trees). In autumn 遍山紅葉 (bian4 shan1 hong2 ye4 = everywhere-on-the-hills-are-red-leaves), but soon 落葉遍地 (luo4 ye4 bian4 di4 = fallen-leaves-are-all-over-the-ground).

by Diana Yue