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 \ 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 tenants

按 Putonghua pronunciation: an4 Cantonese pronunciation: on3
Meaning: press, mortgage, following, according to


按 means 按照 (an4 zhao4 = according-to-copy/follow): 按時 (an4 shi2 = regularly following-time-table), 按理 (an4 li3 = follow-reason = logically-speaking). Team 按部就班 (an4 bu4 jiu4 ban1 = follow-steps-according-to-stage/schedule), completes project.

Anticipating market plunge, potential home-buyers 按兵不動 (an4 bing1 bu4 dong4 = hold-army-no-move = won't take action), prefer 按月付租 (an4 yue4 fu4 zu1 = follow-month-pay-rent = paying rent every month).

by Diana Yue