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 talents**

**智**

Putonghua pronunciation: zhi 4
Cantonese pronunciation: ji 3
Meanings: intelligence, knowledge, intellectual brilliance, wisdom

智 = intellectually smart: 智商 (zhi shang 41 = intelligence-quotient = IQ), chess-player’s 智力 (zhi li 44 = thinking-strength/capacity), computers’ 人工智能 (ren gong zhi neng 2142 = human-work-intelligence-ability = artificial intelligence).
智者 (zhi zhe 43 = wise-person = sages) have 智慧 (zhi hui 44 = fine-knowledge-moral-discernment = intellectual, moral wisdom).
Politicians need 才智 (cai zhi 24 = talent-wisdom), 智库 (zhi ku 44 = knowledge/wisdom-storehouse = think tanks).

Facing pressure/emergencies, 智多星 (zhi duo xing 411 = intelligence-many-star = brilliant strategists) show 急智 (ji zhi 24 = urgent-cleverness = quick/clever idea/response). David 智取 (zhi qu 43 = clever-take = used strategy to capture/defeat) Goliath, avoided 力敵 (li di 42 = strength-oppose/resist = competing with him in muscle-strength).

by Diana Yue