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 tenants

**期**

Putonghua pronunciation: qi1
Cantonese pronunciation: kei4
Meaning: period, stage, term, limit, hope, expect, long

期 (radical 月 yue4 = moon/month) means limit/period: 日期 (ri4 qi1 = day-limit = date), 星期 (xing1 qi1 = star-period = week), 學期 (xue2 qi1 = school-term), 假期 (jia4 qi1 = vacation-period). 到期日 (dao4 qi1 ri4 = arrive-limit-day) means due/expiry date for rent/canned food.

青春期 (qing1 chun1 qi1 = green-spring-stage) = puberty. Bride-to-be 期待 (qi1 dai4 = period-wait = looks forward to) 婚期 (hun1 qi1 = wedding-date/day). 更年期 (geng1 nian2 qi1 = change-year-stage) = menopause. Cancer patient fears 死期 (si3 qi1 = die-date = time/arrival of death).

When lease 期滿 (qi1 man3 = period-full = expires), tenant 期望 (qi1 wang4 = period-look-forward = hopes to) 續期 (xu2 qi1 = continue-period = extend it).

by Diana Yue