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 accidents

警告 (radical 言 yan2, word/speech) means alert/warn: 警覺 (jing3 jue2 = alert-aware), 警告 (jing3 gao4 = alarm-tell = warn), 警戒 (jing3 jie4 = alert-caution). 警方 (jing3 fang1 = police-side) = the police: 警局 (jing3 ju2 = police-station), 警察 (jing3 cha2 = police-watch = policemen), 巡警 (xun2 jing3 = patrol-police).

警匪 (jing3 fei3 = police-and-thugs)' car chase caused 撞车 (zhuang4 che1 = hit-car = car crash). Eye-witness 報警 (bao4 jing3 = reports-to-the-police). 警車 (jing3 che1 = police-car/vehicle) sounding 警號 (jing3 hao4 = alarm-horn/sound = sirens) takes 警員 (jing3 yuan2 = police-men/constables), 警犬 (jing3 quan3 = police-dogs) to scene.

Sage coins 警句 (jing3 ju4 = warn-sentence/statement = stern motto) to 警世 (jing3 shi4 = warn/admonish/reprimand-the-world).

Putonghua pronunciation: jing3
Cantonese pronunciation: ging2
Meaning: alarm, alert, warn, vigilant, police

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