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 hair

型
Putonghua pronunciation: xing2
Cantonese pronunciation: ying4
Meanings: model, mould, type, form, style

型 (radical 土 tu3, earth) = 类型 (lei4 xing2 = type-form = category-type); 血型 (xue3 xing2 = blood-type), 模型 (mo2 xing2 = mould-form = mould/model), 新型 (xin1 xing2 = new-model/style). 型号 (xing2 hao4 = type-number) = machine/garment’s model/type. “有型” (you3 xing2 = has-style) describes stylish/chic person.


发型师 (fa3 xing2 shi1 = hair-style/form-master = hairstylist) studies client’s 臉型 (lian3 xing2 = face-shape), suggests 髮型 (fa3 xing2 = hair/coiffure-style): 直髮 (zhi2 fa3 = straight-hair), 鬃髮 (qian2 fa3 = curly-hair), 馬尾 (ma3 wei3 = horse/pony-tail).

by Diana Yue