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 reunion gatherings

感 (Cantonese pronunciation: gam2)
Meanings: feel, sense, emotion, mood, be moved

感 (radical 心 xin1, heart) means feel/sense, feeling/sensation.
Eyes/nose are 感官 (gan3 guan1 = sense-organs). Body 感覺 (gan3 jue2 = feels-senses) cold/warmth. 感冒 (gan3 mao4 = feel-emerge) = catch influenza.

敏感 (min2 gan3 = clever/alert-feel) means allergic or sensitive.
多愁善感 (duo1 chou2 shan4 gan3 = many-sadness-good-at-feel) describes sentimental persons. Artists need 靈感 (ling2 gan3 = spirit/soul-feel = inspiration).

Husband-and-wife have 感情 (gan3 qing2 = emotions-love = emotional bond), feel 感動 (gan3 dong4 = feel-move = moved) at wedding anniversary. Old friends 感謝 (gan3 xie4 = feel-thankful = thank) reunion’s organizer, exchange past decade’s感受 (gan3 shou4 = feel-receive = impressions/revelations), 百感交集 (bai2 gan3 jiao1 ji2 = hundred-feelings-cross-assemble = are overwhelmed by many mixed feelings).

by Diana Yue