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 resting

### 閒
Putonghua pronunciation: xian2
Cantonese pronunciation: haan4
Meanings: idle, unoccupied, leisure, irrelevant, unimportant


Media star looks 氣定神閒 (qi4 ding4 shen2 xian2 = air-steady-spirit-leisurely = calm/composed/self-assured), denies 聞言聞語 (xian2 yan2 xian2 yu3 = irrelevant-words-irrelevant-speech = gossip), criticizes reporters for 管閒事 (guan3 xian2 shi4 = poking-into-others's-affairs). Lab-door sign says "閒人免進" (xian2 ren2 mian3 jin4 = "Unrelated-persons-no-entry"). Everyone enjoys 偷得浮生半日閒 (tou1 de0 fu2 sheng1 ban4 xian2 xian2 = steal-get-floating/transient-life-half-day-free = snatching a short break from a busy schedule.)

by Diana Yue