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.

Putonghua pronunciation: ti3
Cantonese pronunciation: tai3
Meanings: body

身 = 身體 (shen1 ti3 = body-body) has 頭 (tou2, head), 身軀 (shen1 qu1 = body-trunk), 四肢 (si4 zhi1 = four-limbs): 臂 (bi4, arm), 手 (shou3, hand), 腿 (tui3, leg), 足 (zu2, foot). 四體不勤 (si4 ti3 bu4 qin2 = four-limbs-not-diligent) describes lazybone who never does manual work.

天體者 (tian1 ti3 zhe3 = heaven/nature-body~person = nudist) goes around 裸體 (luo3 ti3 = bare-body = naked). 體育 (ti3 yu4 = body-education = sports), 運動 (yun4 dong4 = revolve-move = exercise) improve our 體格 (ti3 ge2 = body-frame = build/health), 體力 (ti3 li4 = body-strength).

Everyone goes through 生老病死 (sheng1 lao3 bing4 si3 = birth-ageing-illness-death). 屍體 (shi1 ti3 = corpse-body) = dead body.