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 breathing**

呼 (radical 口 kou3 = mouth)

Putonghua pronunciation: hu1
Cantonese pronunciation: foo1
Meanings: exhale, call

呼 = 呼氣 (hu1 qi4 = exhale-air/breath). 呼吸 (hu1 xi1 = exhale-inhale) = breathing. 氣呼呼 (qi4 hu1 hu1 = breath-puff-puff) describes angry expression.

呼 also means 呼喚 (hu1 huan4 = call-beckon). Rude people 呼喝 (hu1 he2 = call-shout). 傳呼機 (chuan2 hu1 ji1 = convey-call-machine) = pager. Best candidate 呼聲高 (hu1 sheng1 gao1 = call-sound-high = stands high chance). Party-makers 呼朋引類 (hu1 peng2 yin3 lei4 = call-friends-solicit-alike/kin = call similarly-minded acquaintances), 招呼 (zhao1 hu1 = wave-call = greet/entertain) guests.

Peace-campaigner 登高一呼 (deng1 gao1 yi1 hu1 = ascend-height-one-shout = makes public proclamation/rally), 呼籲 (hu1 yu4 = call-petition = appeals/calls for) truce, wants everybody to 呼應 (hu1 ying4 = call-answer = echo/respond).

by Diana Yue