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 leisure

Putonghua pronunciation: gng3
Cantonese pronunciation: gon2
Meanings: hurry, rush, drive, chase

趕 (radical 走 zou3, run) means hurry/rush: 趕來 (gan3 lai2 = rush-over-here), 趕去 (gan3 qu4 = rush-over-there), 趕到 (gan3 dao4 = rush/hurriedly-arrive). 趕緊 (gan3 jin3 = rush-tight) = hurrying/“Quick”!

趕 also means drive/chase/speed up. Shepherd 趕羊 (gan3 yang2 = drive~sheep = herds sheep), 趕走 (gan2 zou3 = drive-run = chases away) wolves. Cop 追趕 (zui1 gan3 = pursues~ chases) thief. Smart late-starter 趕上 (gan3 shang4 = rush-on = catches up with) and 趕過 (gan3 guo4 = rush~pass = overtakes) others.

Workers/writers 趕工 (gan3 gong1 = speeds-up~work), 趕稿 (gan3 gao3 = rush~manuscript = speed up writing) to 趕起 (gan3 qi3 = rush~build/complete) project. Busy people always 趕時間 (gan3 shi2 jian1 = chase-time-dimension = are in a hurry).

by Diana Yue