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

服

Putonghua pronunciation: fu2
Cantonese pronunciation: fuk6
Meanings: clothes, be convinced, respect, serve, eat, take

Noun 服 (radical 月 yue4, moon) = 衣服 (yi1 fu2 = coat-clothes = clothes): 工作服 (gong1 zuo2 fu2 = work-do-clothes = work uniform), 丧服 (sang1 fu2 = mourning-clothes).

Transitive verb 服 has multiple meanings. 服务 (fu2 wu4 = serve-chores = serve/service), 服刑 (fu2 xing2 = serve-jail-sentence), 佩服 (pei4 fu2 = esteem-respect), 服从 (fu2 cong2 = respect-follow/obey). Loser服输 (fu2 shu1 = respect-defeat = admits he is inferior).

吞服 (tun1 fu2 = swallow-take) = swallow. Patient 服湯藥 (fu2 tang1 yao4 = take-soup-medicine = takes medicinal concoction). Chinese medicine requires多服 (duo1 fu2 = many-taking/dosages) to be effective. Un-cured patient 服毒自殺 (fu2 du2 zi4 sha1 = swallow-poison-self-kill = commits suicide by swallowing poison).

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