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

納
Putonghua pronunciation: na4
Cantonese pronunciation: naap6
Meanings: inhale, accept, collect

納 = 接納 (jie2 na4 = catch-take = accept), 容納 (rong2 na4 = hold-contain). 納涼 (na4 liang2 = absorb-cool) = cooling down in shade/breeze. 出納員 (chu1 na4 yuan2 = out-in-member) = bookkeeper. 入納款 (na4 shui4 = give/pay-tax). Flexible leaders 採納 (cai3 na4 = adopt-accept) contrarian views.

納 = 吐納之術 (tu4 na4 zhi1 shu4 = exhal-inhale~’s~methods = breathing methods).


“海納百川, 有容乃大” (hai3 na4 bai3 chuan1, you3 rong2 nai3 da4 = sea-takes-in~hundred-rivers, has~big-intake-thus~big) praises hero’s broad/generous heart/vision.

by Diana Yue