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 New York

Putonghua pronunciation: wang4
Cantonese pronunciation: wong6
Meaning: flourishing, prosperous, vigorous, robust, vibrant

旺 (日 ri4, sun + 王 wang2, king/supremacy) describes fire/energy/luck. Athlete 精力旺盛 (jing1 li4 wang4 sheng4 = essence-strength-robust-vibrant = is strong/energetic). Good housewife 旺夫 (wang4 fu1 = prosper-husband = helps husband succeed). Blockbuster movie 旺場 (wang4 chang3 = robust-place = has good box office).

結婚旺月 (jie2 hun1 wang4 yue4 = tie-knot-marriage-prosperous-month) means popular month for holding weddings. 旺舖 (wang4 pu4 = prosperous-shop) means shop-front enjoying good customers/business turnover.

When economy 興旺 (xing1 wang4 = flourishes-booms), commerce 轉旺 (zhuan3 wang4 = turns-vibrant/good). Christmas is retailers' 旺季 (wang4 ji4 = high season for making money). 交投暢旺 (jiao1 tou2 chang4 wang4 = exchange-invest-smooth-robust = big trading volumes) hail in 旺市 (wang4 shi4 = robust-stockmarket).

by Diana Yue