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 auctions

Putonghua pronunciation: gu1
Cantonese pronunciation: goo2
Meanings: estimate, evaluate, assess

估 = 猜估 (cai1 gu1 = guess-estimate) = make guess. Careful person 估量 (gu1 lian4 = estimate-volume = assesses) situation before going ahead. Actuarial 估計 (gu1 ji4 = estimate-compute) rates/risks.

拍賣行 (pai1 mai4 hang2 = auction-hong/houses) study market, do 估價 (gu1 jia4 = guess-price = price estimates) on 鮪魚 (wei3 yu2 = tuna-fish), 土地 (tu3 di4 = earth-land = land), 古董 (gu3 dong3 = ancient-deeply-hidden = antiques). Unwise investors 高估 (gao4 gu1 = high-guess = over-rate/estimate) or 低估 (di1 gu1 = low-guess = under-rate/estimate) stock prices.

估對 (gu1 dui4 = guess-right) = 估中 (gu1 zhong4 = guess-hit-mark) = make right guess. General who 錯估敵情 (cuo4 gu1 di2 qing2 = wrongly-assesses-enemy’s-situation) deserves defeat.

by Diana Yue