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 feeling good

Putonghua pronunciation: xing1, xing4
Cantonese pronunciation: hing3
Meanings: rise, prosper, thrive, interest, pleasure, enthusiasm, fondness, mood

Verb 興 (xing1) means rise/boost. 興學 (xing1 xue2 = rise-school) = boost/expand education. New technologies 興起 (xing1 qi3 = rise-up). Empires 興衰 (xing1 shuai1 = prosper-decline), 興亡 (xing1 wang2 = rise-and-fall). 生意興隆 (sheng1 yi4 xing1 long2 = livelihood-ideas-rise-prosperous) = business thrives.

Success makes us 高興 (gao1 xing4 = high-enthusiasm), 興奮 (xing1 fen4 = enthusiasm-excitement = pleased/excited/elated). 有興趣 (you3 xing4 qu4 = have-interest-pleasure) = feel interested/curious. 興起 (xing4 qi3 = interest-rise) = feels like doing something.

酒興 (jiu3 xing4 = wine/alcohol-mood) = mood for drinking. 詩興大發 (shi1 xing4 da4 fa2 = poetry-enthusiasm-big-develop) = in the mood for reciting/writing poetry. Rain during picnic 掃興 (sao4 xing4 = sweep-away-enthusiasm = spoils the fun).

by Diana Yue