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 hospitalization

合 Putonghua pronunciation: he2
Cantonese pronunciation: hap6
Meaning: join, combine, close, unite, merge, together, sharing

合 (radical 口 kou3, mouth) means 合而為一 (he2 er2 wei4 yi1 = join/unite-and-become-one). Door 開合 (kai1 he2 = opens-closes). Couple 合力 (he2 li4 = join-efforts-to) raise family, 合葬 (he2 zang4 = together-share-burial-grave). 合唱團 (he2 chang4 tuan2 = together-sing-group) = choir/chorus, 聯合國 (lian2 he2 guo2 = link-join-states) = the United Nations.

Partners sign 合作合約 (he2 zuo2 he2 yue4 = co-operate-joint-agreement = collaboration contract). Court verdict 合法合理 (he2 fa3 he2 li3 = conforms-to-law-conforms-to-reason = is legal, reasonable).

Transplanted organ 適合 (shi1 he2 = fits-suits) patient.
Medication 配合 (pei4 he2 = matched-with) physiotherapy help incision 瘴合 (yu4 he2 = heal-mend/close). Recovery progress 符合 (fu2 he2 = seal-match = meets) expectation.

by Diana Yue