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 stupid search

求
Putonghua pronunciation: qiu2
Cantonese pronunciation: kau4
Meanings: beg, seek, search, ask for favor, need, desire, demand

求 = 乞求 (qi1 qiu2 = beg-ask), 哀求 (ai1 qiu2 = sorrowfully/desperately-beg). 求婚 (qiu2 hun1 = ask-marriage) = marriage proposal. Students 求教 (qiu2 jiao4 = ask-for-teacher's advice). Patients 求醫 (qiu2 yi1 = seek-medical-cure). Hot goods 供不應求 (gong1 bu4 ying4 qiu2 = supply-no-nod/satisfy-demand = supply lags behind demand).


Partners 求同存異 (qiu2 tong2 cun2 yi4 = seek-similarity-preserve-differences = collaborate despite differences). Martyr 求仁得仁 (qiu2 ren2 de2 ren2 = seek-benevolence/sacrifice-obtain-benevolence/sacrifice = sacrifices life willingly).

by Diana Yue