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 donations

Putonghua pronunciation: jü4
Cantonese pronunciation: kui5
Meanings: refuse, decline, resist, oppose

拒 (radical 手 = shou3, hand) means 拒絕 (jü4 jüe2 = refuse-cur-off = refuse): 婉拒 (wan3 jü4 = gently-turn-down), 拒婚 (jü4 hun1 = refuse/reject-marriage-proposal), Haughty person 拒人於千里之外 (jü4 ren2 yú1 qian1 li3 zhi1 wai4 = refuse-person/others-at-thousand-miles-'s-away = is extremely aloof/unfriendly).


by Diana Yue