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 comradeship

合 (合) Putonghua pronunciation: he2
Cantonese pronunciation: hap6
Meaning: close, combine, unite, join, fit, merge, suitable, together

合 (合) (△ ji2, triangle + □ kou3, mouth) means 合上 (he2 shang4 = close-up), 適合 (shi1 he2 = suit-fit). Door 張合 (zhang1 he2 = opens-closes). Wounds 愈合 (yü4 he2 = heal-mend). 合情 (he2 qing2 = fit-feeling) = emotionally-understandable/approvable. 合理 (he2 li3 = fit-reason) = reasonable/justifiable. 合法 (he2 fa3 = fit-law) = legitimate/lawful.


Comrades 整合 (zheng3 he2 = re-assemble-join) forces, 融合 (ron2g he2 = melt-join = merge) opinions, 合力 (he2 li4 = unite-strength = work together) to overcome obstacles.

by Diana Yue