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 fever

Putonghua pronunciation: fa1
Cantonese pronunciation: fat1
Meaning: occur, grow, open up, develop, issue, dispatch, emit, shoot, send, flourish

發 (radical 徵 bol, legs going left-right) means occur/develop. Youngster 發育 (fa1 yu4 = develop-breed = grows), 發奮 (fa1 fen4 = develop-lift/assert = makes efforts, works hard), Enterprise 發展 (fa1 zhan3 = flourish-spread = develops), investors 發財 (fa1 cai2 = develop-wealth = get rich).

Scientist’s 發現 (fa1 xian4 = open-up-appear = discovery) 啟發 (qi3 fa1 = open-develop = inspires) researchers. New technology’s 發明 (fa1 ming2 = open-light-up = invention) enables rocket’s 發射 (fa1 she4 = issue-shoot = launching).

Shootings 發生 (fa1 sheng1 = occur-born = occur), victims 發抖 (fa1 dou3 = develop-shake = shake/tremble), 發燒 (fa1 sha1 = develop-heat/fever). Police 發布 (fa1 bu4 = issues-announces) suspect’s identify, 發出 (fa1 chu1 = occur-out = issues) arrest order.

by Diana Yue