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 bank accounts

提 Putonghua pronunciation: ti2
Cantonese pronunciation: tai4
Meaning: lift, hold, carry, raise, mention, take, extract

提 (radical 手 = hand shou3, hand) means lift/bring up: 提出 (ti2 chu1 = raise/suggest-announce): 提議 (ti2 yi4 = raise-propose/proposal), 提名 (ti2 ming2 = raise-name = nominate/nomination).
Writer 提筆 (ti2 bi3 = takes-up-pen), sips coffee to 提神 (ti2 shen2 = stimulate-thoughts).

手提電腦 (shou3 ti2 dian4 nao3 = hand-held-electric/electronic-brain) = portable computer/laptop. 提款機 (ti2 kuan3 ji1 = take-money-machine) = automated/automatic teller machine = ATM.

Banks 提供 (ti2 gong1 = raise-supply = provide) loans/mortgages. 提醒 (ti2 xing3 = raise-awake = remind) borrowers to 提防 (ti2 fang2 = remind-guard = beware): may 提前 (ti2 qian2 = move-earlier) 提高 (ti2 gao1 = raise-higher) interest rates. Speculators 提心吊膽 (ti2 xin1 diao4 dan3 = lift-heart-suspend-gall-bladder = get scary).

by Diana Yue