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 counting your blessings

受
Putonghua pronunciation: shou4
Cantonese pronunciation: sau6
Meaning: receive, accept, take, contain

受 (radical 又 = 手 shou3, hand) means 接受 (jie2 shou4 = accept-receive): 受 益 (shou4 yi1 = receive-benefits), 受 聘 (shou4 ping4 = is-hired), 受 罪 (shou4 fa3 = is-penalized), 受 傷 (shou4 shang1 = is-hurt). 逆來順受 (ni4 lai2 shun4 shou4 = against-come-meekly-accept) = take insults/harassment/blows meekly.

Wife 受 孕 (shou4 yün4 = gets-pregnant). Father-to-be 感 同 身 受 (gan3 tong2 shen1 shou4 = feel/empathize-same-as-body-receive = feels he is going through it himself).

Naïve person 受 害 (shou4 hai4 = is-harmed), 受 骗 (shou4 pian4 = is-cheated), feels 難 受 (nan2 shou4 = difficult-to-accept = unpleasant/miserable), consoles himself: 施 比 受 更 為 有 福 (shi1 bi3 shou4 geng4 wei3 you3 fu2 = give-compared-to-receive-more-be-have-blessing = It is more blessed to give than to receive).

by Diana Yue