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 cycling**

**輪**

*Putonghua pronunciation:* lun2  
*Cantonese pronunciation:* lun4  
*Meanings:* wheel, revolve

輪 has 輪軸 (lun2 zhu2 = wheel-axle), 輪轂 (lun2 fu2 = wheel-spokes). 齒輪 (chi3 lun2 = teeth-wheel = gear wheel) has 輪齒 (lun2 chi3 = wheel-teeth/cogs). Cripple needs 輪椅 (lun2 yi3 = wheel-chair). 摩天輪 (mo1 tian1 lun2 = touch-sky-wheel) = ferris wheel.

Verb 輪 = revolve: 輪流 (lun2 liu2 = revolve-flow = take turns), 輪班 (lun2 ban1 = revolve-shift = take shifts). Buddhists believe in 輪迴 (lun2 hui2 = revolve-return = soul’s reincarnation). “輪到你” (lun2 dao4 ni3 = wheel-reach-you) = “Your turn!”

車輪 (che1 lun2 = cart/car-wheels) needs 輪胎 (lun2 tai1 = wheel-“tire”-transliterated). 三輪車 (san1 lun2 che1 = three-wheel-cart/car) means tricycle. Bicycle is 自行車 (zi4 xing2 che1 = self-walk/move-cart/car).

*by Diana Yue*