Character Builder

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 eyes

盲
Putonghua pronunciation: mang2
Cantonese pronunciation: maang4
Meaning: blind, blindly, muddle-headed


問道於盲 (wen4 dao4 yu1 mang2 = ask-road-from-blind) is useless tactic of asking blind/ignorant person for direction/advice. 盲目 (mang2 mu4 = blind-eye = physically blind) also describes person who 盲從 (mang2 cong2 = blindly-follows/obeys) others or 盲動 (mang2 dong4 = blind-move = acts/makes trouble impulsively/unwisely).

盲人騎瞎馬, 夜半臨深池 (mang2 ren2 qi2 xia1 ma3, ye4 ban4 lin2 shen1 chi2 = blind-man-ride-blind-horse, night-middle-arrive-deep-pond) describes big blunder awaiting unaware/useless protagonist.

by Diana Yue