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 World Cup matches**

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<td>gong1</td>
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攻 = 攻擊 (gong1 ji2 = offensive-attack). 守 = 防守 (fang2 shou3 = guard-defensive). Slander/libel involves 人身攻擊 (ren2 shen1 gong1 ji1 = human-body-offensive-attack = personal attacks).

In 戰爭 (zhan4 zheng1 = war-dispute = war), invaders launch 攻勢 (gong1 shi4 = attack-force = offensive), 進攻 (jin4 gong1 = advance-attack) opponent's territory, 攻打 (gong1 da3 = attack-hit) cities.

In 足球賽 (zui1 qiu2 sai4 = foot-ball-competition = soccer matches), 中鋒 (zhong1 feng1 = center-point/blade = center forward), 翼鋒 (yi4 feng1 = wing-point/blade = winger) 射球 (she4 qiu2 = shoot-ball = strike), 入球 (ri4 qiu2 = enter-ball = score goals). Brazil’s World Cup team 攻無不克 (gong1 wu2 bu4 ke1 = attack-no-not-conquer = conquers all opponents).

by Diana Yue