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 first-home purchases

Putonghua pronunciation: guan1
Cantonese pronunciation: goon1
Meaning: watch, view, vista, observe, monitor, examine, inspect, opinion

觀 (radical 見 jian4, see/watch) = 觀看 (guan1 kan4 = watch-see/look-at), 觀點 (guan1 dian3 = view-point). 觀眾 (guan1 zhong4 = watch-crowd) = audience. Frog/person who 坐井觀天 (zuo4 jing3 guan1 tian1 = sits-in-well-looks-at-sky) has narrow world觀 (shi4 jie4 guan1 = world-border-view = world view).

觀光團 (guan1 guang1 tuan2 = see-scenery-group = tourists) 參觀 (can1 guan1 = join-see = tour) ceramics factory, 観摩 (guan1 mo2 = observe-study) technology, 嘆為觀止 (tan4 wei2 guan1 zhi3 = sigh/exclaim-as-view's-utmost = think it's fabulous).

House-viewer 喜es apartment’s 景觀 (jing3 guan1 = vista-view) but remains 客觀 (ke4 guan1 = guest-see = objective), 観察 (guan1 cha2 = watches-monitors) market, 観望 (guan1 wang4 = watch-look-ahead = observes without committing).

by Diana Yue