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 reporters

真
Putonghua pronunciation: zhen1
Cantonese pronunciation: jan1
Meanings: real, true, sincere, authentic

真 means real/true: 真髪 (zhen1 fa3 = real-hair), 真貨 (zhen1 huo4 = authentic-goods), 真空 (zhen1 kong1 = real-empty = vacuum).

天真 (tian1 zhen1 = heaven/nature-sincere = innocent/naïve) people 真情流露 (zhen1 qing2 liu2 lu4 = true-feelings-flow-show = show/express true feelings spontaneously). Great acting 像真 (xiang4 zhen1 = resembles-reality). Forged copy and painter’s 真跡 (zhen1 jia3 = real-print/track = authentic work) 真假難分 (zhen1 jia3 nan2 fen1 = true-false-cannot-separate = cannot be separately identified as real/false).

Rumors 失真 (shi1 zhen4 = lose/distort-truth). Reporter investigates 真相 (zhen1 xiang4 = true-picture = real facts).

Sincere writer speaks 真心話 (zhen1 xin1 hua4 = true-heart-speech = honest words), defends 真理 (zhen1 li3 = true-principle = infallible/unchallengeable truth).

by Diana Yue