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 job-hunting

Putonghua pronunciation: zhi2
Cantonese pronunciation: jik1
Meanings: post, job, position, office, duty

職 (radical 耳 er3, ear) implies hearing/obeying orders. 職業 (zhi1 ye4 = post-trade) = profession/occupation. 職員 (zhi1 yün2 = staff-members = 職工 zhi1 gong1 = working-employees) hold 職稱 (zhi1 cheng1 = job-titles), perform 職責 (zhi1 ze2 = working-responsibilities). 升職 (sheng1 zhi1 = ascend-post) = promotion. 降職 (jiang4 zhi1 = descend-post) = demotion.

Graduate 求職 (qiù zhi1 = looks-for-job), gets 職位 (zhi1 wei4 = post-position), 盡職 (jin4 zhi1 = exhaust-post = perform duties thoroughly/diligently), never 失職 (shi1 zhi1 = neglects/mishandles-duties). Neck pain is computer worker’s 職業病 (zhi1 ye4 bing4 = occupational-disease).

Soldier’s 天職 (tian1 zhi1 = heaven-post = natural/born duty) is defending country. 殉職 (xün1 zhi1 = die-for-post) means getting killed on account of work/duty.

by Diana Yue