Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 fish


Suspect 潛逃 (qian2 tao2 = secretly-escapes/absconds). Spy 潛伏 (qian2 fu2 = lurks-hides). Infectious disease has 潛伏期 (qian2 fu2 qi1 = submerge-hide-period = symptom-less latency period). 潛台词 (qian2 tai2 ci2 = hidden-stage-words) means stage-play/plan’s unspoken lines/agenda.

Under teacher’s 潛移默化 (qian2 yi2 mo4 hua4 = hidden-move-silent-transform = subtle influence), student with 潛力 (qian2 li4 = potential-ability) 潛心讀書 (qian2 xin1 du2 shu1 = dive-heart-read-books = studies steadily/concentratedly).

Putonghua pronunciation: qian2
Cantonese pronunciation: chim4
Meanings: sink, dive, submerge, hide, secretive, latent, potential

by Diana Yue