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 plans and timetables

進
Putonghua pronunciation: jin4
Cantonese pronunciation: jun3
Meaning: advance, progress, forward, enter

進 (radical 子 chuo4, walk) means 前進 (qian2 jin4 = advance-forward): 進入 (jin4 ru4 = advance/enter-into), 進攻 (jin4 gong1 = advance-attack). 進來 (jin4 tai2 = advance/enter-come = “Come-in!”)

勇於進取 (yong3 jy1 jin4 qy3 = brave-at-advance-acquire) = ambitious/aggressive). 進軍 (jin4 jum1 = advance-army) means invade/invest. 冒進 (mao4 jin4 = risky-advance = rash) investor
無寸進 (wu2 cun4 jin4 = no-inch-progress = doesn’t gain anything).

Student wants 進步 (jin4 bu4 = forward-step = improvement/progress): 不進則退 (bu4 jin4 ze2 tui4 = not-advance-then-retreat) = “No advance/progress means retreat/falling backward!” Teacher 跟進 (gen1 jin4 = follow-advance = follows up on) his 進程 (jin4 cheng2 = advance-process = track record), 進度表 (jin4 du4 biao3 = progress-chart/report).

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