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 Genesis

創 (chuang4)
Cantonese pronunciation: chong3
Meanings: create found

創 means 原創 (yuan2 chuang4 = original-make = create), 創立 (chuang4 li4 = create-stand = found), requires 創思 (chuang4 si1 = creative-idea = originality), 創造力 (chuang4 zao4 li4 = found-make-power = creativity).

Artist 創作 (chuang4 zuo2 = create-work = does creative work). Business talent 創業 (chuang4 ye4 = create-profession = founds business/enterprise), 創新 (chuang4 xin1 = create-new = makes innovations).


by Diana Yue