

# 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.

## This week: Words about Chinese cuisine

蒸

Pronunciation: *zheng* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *jing* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: evaporate, steam

Intransitive verb 蒸 = 蒸發 (*zheng fa* = steam-disperse = evaporate). In 炎蒸 (*yan zheng* = hot-steam) weather, water-vapor 蒸騰 (*zheng teng* = evaporate-rise). 蒸氣機 (*zheng qi ji* = steam-vapor-machine) = steam engine. 蒸餾水 (*zheng liu shui* = evaporated-distilled-water) = distilled water.

Transitive verb 蒸 means steam-cooking food, preserving ingredients' natural juices/flavors: 蒸魚 (*zheng yu* = steamed fish), 蒸蛋 (*zheng dan* = steamed egg-custard), 蒸蟹 (*zheng xie* = steamed crabs). 點心 (*dian xin* = Cantonese dim-sum = dot-heart = petite dumplings) are served in 蒸籠 (*zheng long* = steam-cage = round, lidded bamboo/aluminum steamers).

Missing/vanished persons (probably dead) are described as 人間蒸發 (*ren jian zheng fa* = people-territory-steam-disperse = evaporated from the human world).