

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 kitchens

煙

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yin1*

Meaning: smoke

煙 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) means smoke: 煙霧 (*yan1 wu4* = smoke/mist-fog), 煙雨 (*yan1 yu3* = misty-rain/drizzle), 放煙花 (*fang4 yan1 hua1* = release-smoke-flowers) = fireworks display. 煙薰 (*yan1 xun1* = smoke-fumigate): 煙肉 (*yan1 rou4* = smoked-meat = bacon).

香煙 (*xiang1 yan1* = fragrance-smoke) = cigarette. 雪茄煙 (*xue1 jia1 yan1* = "ci-gar"-transliterated-smoke) = cigar. 抽鴉片煙 (*chou1 ya1 pian4 yan1* = draw/inhale-"o-pium"-transliterated-smoke) = smoke opium.

煙頭 (*yan1 tou2* = cigarette-head/butts) 冒煙 (*mao4 yan2* = rise smoke = emitting smoke) are dangerous. Use 煙灰缸 (*yan1 hui1 gang1* = smoke-ash-pot = ashtray). 烽煙四起 (*feng1 yan1 si4 qi3* = watchtower-smoke-four-rise) describes fire-signals sent to warn invaders are crossing the border, or threat coming from on all sides.

by Diana Yue