

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 kitchens

Putonghua pronunciation: *lu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lo4*

Meanings: stove, furnace, fireplace, hearth, oven

爐 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) covers kitchen's 火爐 (*huo3 lu2* = fire~stove), factory's 鍋爐 (*guo1 lu2* = pot~oven = boiler), temple's 香爐 (*xiang1 lu2* = incense~burner). Rubbish is burned in 焚化爐 (*fen2 hua4 lu2* = burn~transform~oven = incinerators).

爐灶 (*lu2 zao4* = stove~fire-hole = kitchen range/counter) uses 燃料 (*ran2 liao4* = burning~material = fuel): 柴 (*chai2*, firewood), 電 (*dian4*, electricity), 瓦斯 (*wa3 si1* = "gas"-transliterated = 煤氣 *mei2 qi4* = coal~gas). 灶君 (*zao4 jun1* = kitchen-counter~king) = Kitchen God in Chinese mythology.

In Hongkong, 吃火鍋 (*chi1 huo3 guo1* = eat~hot~pot) is called 打邊爐 (*da3 bian1 lu2* = hit~side~stove). 新鮮出爐 (*xin1 xian1 chu1 lu2* = new~fresh~exit~oven) describes freshly-baked buns or latest news.