

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

香

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *heung1*

Meaning: fragrance, aroma, aromatic, tasty, feminine, incense

香 (radical 禾 *huo2*, padi-crop) describes nice-smelling/tasting/associated things: 香蕉 (*xiang1 jiao1* = fragrant-banana), 香檳 (*xiang1 bin1* = "cham-pagne"-transliterated). In her 香閨 (*xiang1 gui1* = fragrant-room = boudoir), damsel 睡得香 (*shui4 de2 xiang1* = sleeps-soundly).

香水 (*xiang1 shui3* = fragrant-water = perfumes/colognes) fake 體香 (*ti3 xiang1* = body-fragrance), Hong Kong's Chinese name is 香港 (*xiang1 gang3*, Cantonese *heung1 gong2* = fragrant/incense-harbour): we once produced/exported 香 (*xiang1* = incense/joss-sticks).

Chef uses 香草 (*xiang1 cao3* = aromatic-herbs), 香料 (*xiang1 liao4* = aromatic-materials = spices), adding 香味 (*xiang1 wei4* = fragrant/nice-taste) to dishes. Kitchen emits 香氣 (*xiang1 qi4* = nice-aromas). Don't believe 隔籬飯香 (*ge2 li2 fan4 xiang1* = across-fencing-rice-good-smelling = the grass is greener on your neighbour's side).

by Diana Yue