

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 cooking shows

Putonghua pronunciation: *lu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lo4*

Meanings: furnace, stove, oven, cooker, range

爐 (radical火 *huo3*, fire) = 火爐 (*huo3 lu2* = fire~furnace), 鍋爐 (*guo1 lu2* = pot~furnace = boiler), 煮食爐 (*zhu3 shi2 lu2* = cook~eat~stove = cooking stove). Housewives use 電爐 (*dian4 lu2*, electric~stoves), 煤氣爐 (*mei2 qi4 lu2* = coal~gas~stove = gas stoves), 微波爐 (*wei1 bo1 lu2* = micro~wave~ovens).

爐火純青 (*lu2 huo3 chun2 qing1* = furnace~fire~pure~blue) describes art/skill/intellect reaching finest/purest state. Poetic description 紅粉當爐 (*hong2 fen3 dang1 lu2* = red~powder~facing~stove) describes eatery's pretty lady-cook manning stoves and serving customers.

明爐燒烤 (*ming2 lu2 shao1 kao3* = bright~stove/fire~burn~roast = high-flame barbecue) produces delicious Cantonese roast duck. 另起爐灶 (*ling4 qi3 lu2 zao4* = separately~build~oven~stove) means quitting original group to start similar operation.

by Diana Yue