

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

味

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mei6*

Meanings: smell, taste

味覺 (*wei4 jue2* = taste-feel) = sense of taste. Nose smells perfume's 香味 (*xiang1 wei4* = aromatic-smell = fragrance), armpit's 臭味 (*cou4 wei4* = bad-smell). Tongue's 味蕾 (*wei4 lei2* = taste-buds) discern 味道 (*wei4 dao4* = taste-path = tastes): 鹹 (*xian2*, salty), 甜 (*tian2*, sweet), 酸 (*suan1*, sour), 苦 (*ku3*, bitter), 辣 (*la4*, spicy-hot).

Chef adjusts 濃 (*nong2*, richness), 淡 (*dan4*, blandness) to make dishes 美味 (*mei3 wei4* = beautiful-taste = delicious). Kitchen's 五味架 (*wu5 wei4 jia4* = five-tastes-rack = condiments rack) has 味精 (*wei4 jing1* = taste-essence = monosodium glutamate = MSG).

Bores 言語無味 (*yan2 yu3 wu2 wei4* = words-speech-no-taste = talk tastelessly/dryly). Fashion designers have 品味 (*pin3 wei4* = appreciate-taste = aesthetic taste).