

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

演

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yin2*

Meanings: evolve, deduce, act, show, perform

演 (radical 彳 = 水 *shui3*, water) means changing/evolving/acting. 演員 (*yan3 yüan2* = actors) 演戲 (*yan3 xi4* = act-drama = act/perform), 演繹 (*yan3 yi4* = deduce-interpret = interpret) roles.

烹飪節目 (*peng1 ren4 jie2 mu4* = cook-well-section-item = cooking programs) on TV are 表演 (*biao3 yan3* = surface-act = shows). Chefs 做秀 (*zuo4 xiu4* = do-“show”-transliterated = put on a show), 演出 (*yan3 chu1* = act-out = perform/demonstrate) cooking techniques: 切 (*qie4*, cut/slice), 醃 (*yan1*, marinate), 蒸 (*zheng1*, steam), 煮 (*zhu3*, boil), 煎 (*jian1*, shallow-fry), 炒 (*chao3*, stir-fry/sauté), 炸 (*zha4*, deep-fry).

Foodies love to 扮演 (*ban4 yan3* = impersonate-act = play/impersonate) restaurant customers, enjoy 高級烹飪 (*gao1 ji2 peng1 ren4* = high-class-cook-well = high-class/sophisticated/expensive cooking = haute cuisine).

by Diana Yue