

Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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 fever

燒

Putonghua pronunciation: *shao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *siu1*

Meaning: burn, heat, boil, cook, roast, fever

燒 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) means burn/heat/cook. Housewives 燒水 (*shao1 shui3* = heat/boil-water), 燒飯 (*shao1 fan4* = cook-rice/meal). Restaurants serve 燒鴨 (*shao1 ya1* = Cantonese roast-duck), 叉燒 (*cha1 shao1* = Cantonese “cha1 siu1” = forked-roast = barbecued pork), 紅燒豆腐 (*hong2 shao1 dou4 fu4* = red-cook-bean-curd = soy-sauce-stewed tofu).

Factories 燒煤 (*shao1 mei2* = burn/use-coal as fuel). Killns 燒製陶瓷 (*shao1 zhi4 tao2 ci2* = fire-produce-pottery-porcelain = make ceramics). 燒紅 (*shao1 hong2* = burnt-red = red hot) iron flattens creases.

Fire-victim 燒傷 (*shao1 shang1* = is burnt-wounded), 發高燒 (*fai gaol shao1* = develops-high-fever/temperature), finally 退燒 (*tui4 shao1* = retreat-fever = fever/temperature goes away), but 燒焦 (*shao1 jiao1* = burnt-and-seared/charred) skin leaves scars.

by Diana Yue