

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 gourmet dining

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhen 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jan 1*

Meanings: rare, precious, treasured

珍 = 珍稀 (*zhen xi 11* = precious-rare), 珍貴 (*zhen gui 14* = precious-elevated/expensive). 珍寶 (*zhen bao 13* = rarity-treasure) = treasures.

燕窩 (*yan wo 41* = swallow's-nest = swallow's dried saliva), 魚翅 (*yu chi 24* = fish-wing = shark's fin) are 山珍海錯 (*shan zhen hai cuo 1134* = mountain-treasure-sea-resources = valuable edibles from land and sea). 美食家 (*mei shi jia 321* = beautiful-food-master = gourmets) dine sipping 珍藏名釀 (*zhen cang ming niang 1224* = valuable-hoard-famous-brew = much-praised wine in someone's prided collection).

We 珍惜 (*zhen xi 11* = treasure-love/care = care about) those we love. We say “珍重!” (*zhen zhong 14* = treasure-important = “Take care!”) to those about to depart.