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 Chinese recipes

蛋
Putonghua pronunciation: dan4
Cantonese pronunciation: daan6
Meanings: egg

乾貝煎蛋 (gan1 bei4 jian1 dan4 = dried-scallops-fry-eggs = conpoy omelette): 浸 (jin4, soak) handful of conpoy until soft, pull into 幼絲 (you4 si1 = fine-silk = thin shreds). Beat 黃 (huang2 = yellow = yolks) and 白 (bai2 = whites) of four 雞蛋 (ji1 dan4 = chicken-eggs), mix with油 (you2, oil), 鹽 (yan2, salt), 酒 (jiu3, wine)

On medium-fire, heat oil in 炒 (huo4 = Cantonese “wok”), lightly 炒 (chao3, stir-fry) conpoy, pour in eggs to form round shape. 煎 (jian1, light-fry) on both sides till slightly 焦黃 (jiao1 huang2 = charred-yellow = browned) at edges. Serve hot/warm.

Patisserie sells 蛋糕 (dan4 gao1 = egg-pudding = cakes). Intruder is told: “滾蛋!” (gun3 dan4 = roll-egg = “Get out!”)

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