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

肉
Putonghua pronunciation: rou4
Cantonese pronunciation: yuk6
Meanings: meat, pork

Many Chinese recipes use “肉”, i.e. 肉 (zhu1 rou4 = pig-meat = pork), e.g. 叉烧 (cha1 shao1 = fork-burn/roast = barbecued-pork):

Soak 1 公斤 (gong1 jin1 = common-catty = kilo) of 豬柳肉 (zhu1 liu3 rou4 = pig-fillet-meat) in mixture of 生抽 (sheng1 chou1 = raw-draw = light-brown soy-sauce), 老抽 (lao3 chou1 = old-draw = dark-brown soy-sauce), 梅酱 (mei4 jiang4 = plum-sauce/jam), 蜜糖 (mi4 tang2 = honey-sugar = honey), 酒 (jiu3, wine), 胡椒粉 (hu2 jiao1 fen3 = pepper-power). 醃 (ye4 = marinade) for 3 hours.

Brown pork in 油轆 (you2 huo4 = oiled wok). 嘴水 (pen1 shui3 = spray-with-water), cover wok, heat for 15 minutes. 切片 (qie4 pian4 = cut-into-slices), serve warm or cold.

by Diana Yue