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 kitchens

厨
Putonghua pronunciation: chu2
Cantonese pronunciation: chue4
Meanings: kitchen

Standard home has 廚房 (chu2 fang2 = kitchen-room = kitchen), 飯廳 (fan4 ting1 = rice/meal-hall = dining room), 客廳 (ke4 ting1 = guest-hall = sitting room), 睡房 (shui4 fang2 = sleep-room = bedrooms), 書房 (shu1 fang2 = books-room = study).

廚 (= 廚子 chu2 zi0 = kitchen-son/person = cooks) use 廚具 (chu2 ju4 = kitchen-tools/utensils): 刀 (dao1, knife), 勺 (shao1, spoon/ladle), 鍋 (guo1, pot/pan), 廚 (can3, spatula), 蒸籠 (zheng1 long2 = steaming-cage/basket), 烤爐 (kao3 lu2 = baking-stove = oven).

Housewives 入廚 (ru4 chu2 = enter-kitchen = cook meals). Ideal wife 入得廚房, 出得廳堂 (ru4 de1 chu2 fang2, chu1 de1 ting1 tang2 = enter-succeed-kitchen-room, appear-succeed-hall-foyer = is a good cook, also a presentable lady).

by Diana Yue