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 cooking shows

Putonghua pronunciation: jǔ4
Cantonese pronunciation: gui6
Meanings: tool, utensil, equipment, talent, furnished, detailed

Verb transitive 具 means have/possess. London 具有 (jǔ4 you3 = equip-have = has) urban charm, 具備 (jǔ4 bei4 = equipped-available = has) adequate facilities to host Olympics. 具象 (jǔ4 xiang4 = having-image = figurative) art is not 抽象 (chou1 xiang4 = extract-form = abstract). 具體 (jǔ4 ti3 = having-body) describes concrete/specific plans/actions.

Noun 具 means 器具 (qi4 jǔ4 = instruments-tools): 工具 (gong1 jǔ4 = work-tools), 餐具 (can1 jǔ4 = dining-tools), 農具 (nong2 jǔ4 = farming-tools). Poet 畫有 outstanding 才具 (cai2 jǔ4 = talent-equipment = talent). However, 陽具 (yang2 jǔ4 = male/yang-force-tool) means penis.

廚具 (chu2 jǔ4 = kitchen/cooking-utensils) include 刀 (dao1, knife), 剪 (jian3, scissors/shears), 鍋 (guo1, pot/pan), 盤 (pan1, bowl/plate), 條 (shuo2, spoon/dipper), 鍋 (chan3, spatula).

by Diana Yue