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 \ 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 salads

果

Putonghua pronunciation: guo3
Cantonese pronunciation: gwoh2
Meanings: fruit, result

果 = 田 (tian2, field) + 木 (mu4, wood/tree/plant). Farmers harvest 果實 (guo3 shi2 = fruit-solid = fruit/grains). 果樹 (guo3 shu4 = fruit-trees) in 果園 (guo3 yuan2 = fruit-gardens orchards) yield 橘子 (jü2 zi0 = oranges), 葡萄 (pu2 tao2 = vines/grapes).

To make 水果沙拉 (shui3 guo3 sha1 la1 = water-fruit-“salad”-transliterated = fruit salad), take 蘋果 (ping2 guo3 = apple-fruit = apples), 菠蘿 (bo1 luo2 = pineapples), 西瓜 (xi1 gua1 = west-melon = watermelons), 蘋果皮 (guo3 pi2 = fruit-skin), remove 果核 (guo3 he2 = fruit-nucleus = stones/seeds), 切塊 (qie4 kuai4 = cut-into-pieces/strips), mix with白酒 (bai2 jiu3 = white-wine). 果然好吃! (guo3 ran2 hao3 chi4 = fruit/result-certainly-good-eat = As expected/indeed, it’s delicious!)

by Diana Yue