

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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

飯

Putonghua pronunciation: *fan4*
Cantonese pronunciation: *faan6*
Meanings: cooking rice, meal

Making 炒飯 (*chao3 fan4* = stir-fry~rice = fried rice) with 贖飯 (*sheng4 fan4* = leftover~rice), 贖菜 (*sheng4 cai4* = leftover~vegi/dishes): Break 飯團 (*fan4 tuan2* = rice~lumps) into 飯粒 (*fan4 li1* = rice~grains). Dice/julienne leftover 肉 (*rou4*, meat), 菜 (*cai4*, vegi), season with 醬油 (*jiang4 you2* = soy-sauce), 酒 (*jiu3*, wine).

Heat finely-chopped 薑 (*jiang1*, ginger) in oiled wok, add rice, stir evenly with 鑊剷 (*huo4 chan3* = wok~spade = spatula/turner/flipper). Stir in leftovers, one 蛋 (*dan4*, egg), salt, pepper, 麻油 (*ma2 you2* = sesame~oil). Done! “化腐朽為神奇!” (*hua4 fu4 xiu3 wei2 shen2 qi2* = transform~decayed~rotten~into~awesome~wonder = “It’s a miracle!”)

炒冷飯 (*chao2 leng3 fan4* = stir-fry~cold~rice) also means re-do an old idea/story without innovation.

by Diana Yue