

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 fire

燒

Putonghua pronunciation: *shao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *siu1*

Meaning: burn, cook, fever

燒 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) means 燃燒 (*ran2 shao1* = burn-burn): 燒煤 (*shao mei2* = burn-coal as fuel), 燒柴 (*shao1 chai2* = burn-firewood as fuel), Patient 發燒 (*fa1 shao1* = develops-fever), takes medicine, 退燒 (*tui4 shao1* = subside-fever = fever goes away).

Housewives 燒水 (*shao1 shui3* = boil-water), 燒飯 (*shao1 fan4* = cook-rice/meal), make 燒餅 (*shao1 bing3* = burn-cake = grilled sesame-topped crispy dough-cakes). Movie tycoon 燒錢 (*shao1 qian2* = burns-money = flings away millions) for propaganda, Bombed town 焚燒 (*fen2 shao1* = burns-burns), Citizens 燒死 (*shao1 si3* = are-burnt-dead), 燒傷 (*shao1 shang1* = are-burnt-injured), everything 燒光 (*shao1 guang1* = burn-light/cleared = burnt down/away completely). Mourning Buddhists pray, 燒香 (*shao1 xiang1* = burn-fragrance/incense/joss-sticks).

by Diana Yue