

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 salads

素

Putonghua pronunciation: *su4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *so3*

Meanings: white, white silk, uncolored, unadorned, plain, vegetarian, basic element

素 (radical 糸 *mi4*, rope/string) means white/uncolored silk, hence 素白 (*su4 bai2* = uncolored~white) means light/plain/white-color. 樸素 (*pu3 su4* = un-lavish-unadorned) = frugal. 素服 (*su4 fu2* = white~clothes) = plainly dressed, without adornment, as in mourning. 元素 (*yüan2 su4* = primary~factor) = chemical element.

Devout Buddhists 吃素 (*chi1 su4* = eat~plain = take vegetarian diet without meat/eggs). Most people 吃葷 (*chi1 hun1* = eat~meat/fish = are non-vegetarian). 素雞 (*su4 ji1* = vegetable~chicken), 素鵝 (*su4 e2* = vegetable~goose), made from tofu, are imitations of chicken/goose meat.

青菜 (*qing1 cai4* = green~leafy-vegetables) contain 葉綠素 (*ye4 lü4 su4* = leaf~green~element = chlorophyll). 水果 (*shui3 guo3* = water~fruit = fruits) contain 維生素 (*wei2 sheng1 su4* = sustain~life~element = vitamins).

by Diana Yue