

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 hams

醃

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yim1*

Meanings: salt, cure, marinate, pickle, preserve, salt

醃 has radical 酉 (*you3*, wine/wine-urn). 酉 is radical of 醋 (*cu4*, vinegar), 醬 (*jiang4*, thick seasoning paste), 醃 (*yan1*, soak, seep, marinate, cure, pickle), 酵 (*jiao4*, ferment), 釀 (*rang4*, brew), 酒 (*jiu3*, wine, alcohol, liquor, liqueur), 醉 (*zui4*, drunken).

Vineyards 釀酒 (*rang4 jiu3* = brew~wine).

醃料 (*yan1 liao4* = marinate~materials) = marinade. Chef makes 醃肉 (*yan1 rou4* = cured~meat), 醃菜 (*yan1 cai4* = marinated~vegetables = pickles), 醃蛋 (*yan1 dan4* = cured~egg). Japanese love 漬物 (*zi4 wu4* = pickled~things = Japanese term *tsukemono*).

火腿 (*huo3 tui3* = fire~leg = hams) are salted/cured/wind-dried. 醃鹹魚 (*yan1 xian2 yu2* = marinate~salty~fish = make salt fish by inserting salt and sun-drying) is also slangy expression meaning going without shower/bath, therefore smelling of body sweat/odour.

by Diana Yue