

Character Builder

您好嗎? 乾

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 hams

乾

Putonghua pronunciation: *gan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gon1*

Meanings: dry, dehydrated, make dry

乾 means dehydrated. 餅乾 (*bing3 gan1* = cake-dried = biscuits), 牛肉乾 (*niu2 rou4 gan1* = cow-meat-dried = beef jerkies) are 乾糧 (*gan1 liang2* = dehydrated-foods). Intercepted streams are 乾涸 (*gan4 he2* = dry-dried-up). Un-watered plants are 乾枯 (*gan1 ku1* = dried-up-wilted).

Clothes are washed 乾淨 (*gan1 jing4* = dry-pure = clean), 曬乾 (*shai4 gan1* = sun-dried). 臘腸 (*la4 chang2* = cured-sausages), 臘鴨 (*la4 ya1* = cured-duck) are 風乾 (*feng1 gan1* = wind-dried) winter delicacies.

Diners enjoy Spanish 風乾火腿 (*feng1 gan1 huo3 tui3* = wind-dried-fire-leg = cured ham), say “乾杯!” (*gan1 bei1* = dry-cup = “Bottoms up!”) Worries are forgotten 一乾二淨 (*yi1 gan1 er4 jing4* = one-dry-two-pure = thoroughly).

by Diana Yue