

## Writing and sound system of the Japanese Language

Three writing systems are employed together in writing Japanese. They are Kanji(Chinese characters), Hiragana and Katakana. In addition, Romaji (the Romanization by alphabets) is used in certain special cases.

Kanji was introduced into Japan in ancient times. After their introduction, two other writing method were gradually developed. One is Hiragana, derived from the cursive style of Kanji, the other is Katakana, derived from parts of Kanji.

Most words are written in Kanji, Hiragana, or a combination of the two. Katakana is normally used to represent foreign words, loan words, or mimetic sounds. Most of Japanese loan words came from English words.

‘—’ represents a long vowel. ‘C’ and ‘V’ represent ‘consonants’ and ‘vowels’ respectively.

Each Hiragana or Katakana represents a vowel or a consonant and vowel. We are going to introduce you how to read and write Japanese characters step by step.

Next part will introduce basic Hiragana and Romanization.

(NOTE: ‘:’ represents long vowel in this booklet.)



Vowel	a	i	u	e	o
Hiragana	あ	い	う	え	お
Katakana	ア	イ	ウ	エ	オ
‘k’ and vowel	ka	ki	ku	ke	ko
Hiragana	か	き	く	け	こ
Katakana	カ	キ	ク	ケ	コ
‘s’ or ‘sh’ and vowel	sa	shi	su	se	so
Hiragana	さ	し	す	せ	そ
Katakana	サ	シ	ス	セ	ソ
‘t’ , ‘ch’ , or ‘ts’ and vowel	ta	chi	tsu	te	to
Hiragana	た	ち	つ	て	と
Katakana	タ	チ	ツ	テ	ト
‘n’ and vowel	na	ni	nu	ne	no
Hiragana	な	に	ぬ	ね	の

Katakana	ナ	ニ	ヌ	ネ	ノ
'h' or 'f' and vowel	ha	hi	fu	he	ho
Hiragana	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
Katakana	ハ	ニ	フ	ヘ	ホ
'm' and vowel	ma	mi	mu	me	mo
Hiragana	ま	み	む	め	も
Katakana	マ	ミ	ム	メ	モ
'y'(half-vowel)and vowel	ya		yu		yo
Hiragana	や		ゆ		よ
Katakana	ヤ		ユ		ヨ
'r' and vowel	ra	ri	ru	re	ro
Hiragana	ら	り	る	れ	ろ
Katakana	ラ	リ	ル	レ	ロ
'w' and vowel	wa				(w)o
Hiragana	わ				を
Katakana	ワ				ヲ

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'g' and vowel	ga	gi	gu	ge	go
Hiragana	が	ぎ	ぐ	げ	ご
Katakana	ガ	ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ
'z' or 'j' and vowel	za	ji	zu	ze	zo
Hiragana	ざ	じ	ず	ぜ	ぞ
Katakana	ザ	ジ	ズ	ゼ	ゾ
'd' , 'j' , or 'z' and vowel	da	ji	zu	de	do
Hiragana	だ	(ぢ)	(づ)	で	ど
Katakana	ダ	(ヂ)	(ヅ)	デ	ド

\*The letters in ( ) are seldom used.

'b' and vowel	ba	bi	bu	be	bo
Hiragana	ば	び	ぶ	べ	ぼ
Katakana	バ	ビ	ブ	ベ	ボ
'p' and vowel	pa	pi	pu	pe	po
Hiragana	ぱ	ぴ	ぷ	ペ	ぽ

Katakana	パ	ピ°	プ	ペ°	ポ°
'ky' and vowel	kyā		kyū		kyō
Hiragana	きや		きゅ		きょ
Katakana	キヤ		キュ		キヨ
'sh' and vowel	shā		shū		shō
Hiragana	しや		しゅ		しょ
Katakana	シヤ		シュ		シヨ
'ch' and vowel	chā		chu		cho
Hiragana	ちや		ちゅ		ちょ
Katakana	チヤ		チュ		チヨ
'ny' and vowel	nyā		nyū		nyō
Hiragana	にや		にゅ		にょ
Katakana	ニヤ		ニュ		ニヨ
'hy' and vowel	hyā		hyū		hyō
Hiragana	ひや		ひゅ		ひょ
Katakana	ヒヤ		ヒュ		ヒヨ
'my' and vowel	myā		myū		myō
Hiragana	みや		みゅ		みょ
Katakana	ミヤ		ミュ		ミヨ
'ry' and vowel	ryā		ryū		ryo
Hiragana	りや		りゅ		りょ
Katakana	リヤ		リュ		リヨ
'gy' and vowel	gyā		gyū		gyō
Hiragana	ぎや		ぎゅ		ぎょ
Katakana	ギヤ		ギュ		ギヨ
'j' and vowel	ja		ju		jo
Hiragana	じや		じゅ		じょ
Katakana	ジヤ		ジュ		ジヨ
'by' and vowel	byā		byū		byō
Hiragana	びや		びゅ		びょ
Katakana	ビヤ		ビュ		ビヨ
'py' and vowel	pyā		pyū		pyō
Hiragana	ぴや		ぴゅ		ぴょ
Katakana	ピヤ		ピュ		ピヨ

## **Syllable and Mora**

There is a basic unit ‘Mora’ in Japanese sound system. Moras are almost the same as syllables, but there are some slight differences. For example: “わたし”(I) has three moras and in this case the moras are the same as syllables. However, “おとうさん”(father) has three syllables: (お／とう／さん), but five moras: (お／と／う／さ／ん).

And “きって”(stamp) has two syllables: (きつ／て) but three moras (き／つ／て).

So a syllable with a long vowel, “と／う”, or a syllable with “ん”sound,”さ／ん” consists of two moras. Similarly, “き／つ／て”which includes double consonant has three moras.

***Listen to the sound. Which did you hear?***



*oji-san*

- 1) 1.おじさん(uncle, middle aged man)

*ojii-san*

- 2.おじいさん(grandfather, old man)

*oji-san*

- 2) 1.おじさん(uncle, middle aged man)

*ojii-san*

- 2.おじいさん(grandfather, old man)

*saka*

- 3) 1.さか(slope)

*sakka*

- 2.さつか(author, writer)

*saka*

- 4) 1. さか(slope)  
*sakka*  
2. さつか(author, writer)  
*ki-no-hako*
- 5) 1. きのはこ(wooden box)  
*kin-no-hako*  
2. きんのはこ(golden box)

- ki-no-hako*
- 6) 1. きのはこ(wooden box)  
*kin-no-hako*  
2. きんのはこ(golden box)

- oba-san*
- 7) 1. おばさん(aunt, middle aged woman)  
*obaa-san*  
2. おばあさん (grandmother, old woman)

- oba-san*
- 8) 1. おばさん(aunt, middle aged woman)  
*obaa-san*  
2. おばあさん (grandmother, old woman)

- kite*
- 9) 1. きて(Please come)  
*kitte*  
2. きつて(stamp)

- kite*
- 10) 1. きて(Please come)  
*kitte*  
2. きつて(stamp)

*-sama*

11) 1. ～さま(Mr.[ ], Ms [ ])

*sanma*

2. さんま(a Pacific saury; a kind of fish)

*-sama*

12) 1. ～さま(Mr.[ ], Ms [ ])

*sanma*

2. さんま(a Pacific saury; a kind of fish)

### Useful Daily Expression



<i>Ohayo: gozaimasu.</i> おはようございます	Good morning.
<i>Kon-nichi-wa.</i> こんにちは	Hello.
<i>Konban-wa.</i> こんばんは	Good evening.
<i>Sayo:nara.</i> さようなら	Good-bye !
<i>Hajimemashite.</i> はじめまして	How do you do ?
<i>Itte kimasu.</i> いってきます	I'm leaving [going] now. a greeting phrase.
<i>Itte rasshai.</i> いってらっしゃい	See you (later). A greeting phrase.
<i>Tadaima.</i> ただいま	Hello, I'm back [home]. a greeting phrase.
<i>O-kaeri nasai.</i> おかえりなさい	Welcome back [home]. a greeting phrase.
<i>O-saki-ni shitsure: shimasu.</i> おさきにしつれいしま	Good-bye (the literal meaning is “ I'm leaving before you”) a greeting phrase.

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<i>O-tsukare-sama-deshita.</i> おつかれさまでした	Good-bye. a greeting phrase to a person who goes home after work.
<i>Arigato:-gozaimasu.</i> ありがとうございます	Thank you.
<i>Sumimasen.</i> すみません	Excuse me. / I'm sorry. / Thank you.
<i>Gomen-nasai.</i> ごめんなさい	I'm sorry.
<i>Chotto matte kudasai.</i> ちょっと まって ください	Wait a minute.

## Classroom Expression



<i>Hajimemasho:</i> はじめましょう	Let's begin.
<i>Kiite kudasai.</i> きいて ください	Please Listen.
<i>Itte kudasai.</i> いって ください	Please say.
<i>Kaite kudasai.</i> かいて ください	Write it down, please.
<i>Mite kudasai.</i> みて ください	Please look.
<i>Mo: ichido.</i> もう いちど	Once more.
<i>Isshō-ni do:zo.</i> いっしょに どうぞ	All together.
<i>Wakarimashitaka.</i> わかりましたか	Do you understand?
<i>Hai.</i> はい	Yes.
<i>Iie.</i> いいえ	No.
<i>Ii-desu.</i> いいです	That's fine.
<i>Chigaimasu.</i> ちがいます	That's incorrect.
<i>Yasumimasho:</i> やすみましょう	Let's have a break.
<i>Owarimasho:</i> おわりましょう	Let's stop here.