

# HIRAGANA

**for** Beginners

Part I : Reading



KIRABOSHI

# The Three Japanese Writing Systems



Japanese uses three types of writing systems.

## 1. Hiragana

There are 46 basic characters, and each one represents a sound. These characters are arranged in a traditional pattern called the Gojuon. The Gojuon chart organizes them by vowels (a, i, u, e, o) in rows, and consonants (k, s, t, n, etc.) in columns. This makes it easy to learn the sounds step by step.

Example: あ (a) い (i) う (u) え (e) お (o)

## 2. Katakana

There are also 46 basic characters, and they match the hiragana sounds. It's used for foreign words, names, and onomatopoeia (sound words).

Example: ア (a) イ (i) ウ (u) エ (e) オ (o)

## 3. Kanji

They originated in ancient China. Kanji sometimes has more than one pronunciation.

Example: 日本 Nihon /Nippon (Japan)

**Don't worry, you don't have to master them all at once!**

At first, we'll also include romaji (Japanese written using the English alphabet) to help you read Japanese. You don't need to memorize everything right away. Take your time and enjoy learning!

# Hiragana Sounds

## 1. Vowels

Japanese has 5 vowels, and they're easy to pronounce.

Here's how they sound:

- あ a : like the "a" in "father"
- い i : like the "ee" in "see"
- う u : like the "oo" in "food"
- え e : like the "e" in "bed"
- お o : like the "o" in "go"



あ a



い i



う u



え e



お o

## 2. Consonants

Every syllable (except for “ん” n) is made by combining one consonant and one vowel.

Example:

- か ka = consonant k + vowel a
- す su = consonant s + vowel u
- も mo = consonant m + vowel o

Japanese doesn't use single consonants like “k” or “s” — it combines them with vowels, like ka, sa, ma.

Japanese people learn hiragana in this order:

**a-ka-sa-ta-na-ha-ma-ya-ra-wa-o-n.**

This follows the traditional Gojuon pattern.

# ひらがな Hiragana



あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o
か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so
た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no
は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho
ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo
や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro
わ wa				を o
ん n				

# Special Sounds in Hiragana: Dakuon, Handakuon, and Yoon

## 1. だくおん Dakuon

Dakuon refers to sounds that have two small dots ( ` ) next to the character.

Example:

- か ka → が ga
- さ sa → ざ za

## 2. へんだくおん Handakuon

Handakuon refers to sounds that have a small circle ( ° ) next to the character.

Example:

- は ha → ぱ pa
- ふ fu → ぷ pu

## 3. ようおん Yoon

Yoon refers to sounds made by adding small versions of the character や (ya), ゆ (yu), or よ (yo) to other characters. These small characters are written in a smaller size, placed to the right of the original character.

Example:

- き ki + や ya = きゃ kya
- に ni + ゆ yu = にゅ nyu
- ぴ pi + よ yo = ぴょ pyo



だくおん・はんだくおん・ようおん

が ga	ぎ gi	ぐ gu	げ ge	ご go
ざ za	じ zi	ず zu	ぜ ze	ぞ zo
だ da	ぢ ji	づ zu	で de	ど do
ば ba	び bi	ぶ bu	べ be	ぼ bo
ぱ pa	ぴ pi	ぷ pu	ぺ pe	ぽ po

きゃ kya	きゅ kyu	きょ kyo
しゃ sya	しゅ syu	しゅ syo
ちゃ cha	ちゅ chu	ちゅ cho
にゃ nya	にゅ nyu	にゅ nyo
ひゃ hya	ひゅ hyu	ひゅ hyo
みゃ mya	みゅ myu	みゅ myo
りゃ rya	りゅ ryu	りゅ ryo

ぎゃ gya	ぎゅ gyu	ぎょ gyo
じゃ ja	じゅ ju	じゅ jo
びゃ bya	びゅ byu	びゅ byo
ぴゃ pya	ぴゅ pyu	ぴゅ pyo



# Pronunciation Tips

## 1. Double Consonants

Double consonants in Japanese are written with a small っ (tsu) .

They only appear before k, t, s, and p sounds. You don't pronounce the small っ itself — it just creates a pause.

Example: 買って kitte – stamp    ざっし zasshi – magazin    にっぽん Nippon – Japan

## 2. Long Vowels

Long vowels in Japanese make the vowel sound last for two beats. They are important because they can change the meaning of a word.

Example:

- "aa" → おかあさん okaasan – mother
- "ii" → おじいさん ojiisan – grandfather
- "uu" → すうじ suuji – number
- "ee" → えいが eega – movie      おねえさん oneesan – older sister
- "oo" → おおきい ookii – big      とおり toori – street

Some words look almost the same, but the long vowel makes a big difference:

- おばさん obasan – aunt vs おばあさん obaasan – grandmother
- おじさん ojisan – uncle vs おじいさん ojiisan – grandfather
- とり tori – bird vs とおり toori – street



# Pronunciation Tips

## 3. Weak i and u Sounds

In Japanese, the vowels い (i) and う (u) are sometimes whispered or dropped. This happens especially when they are between voiceless consonants like k, s, t, p and h. The sound is still there, but very light.

Example:

- あした ash(i)ta – tomorrow
- おはようございます ohayoo gozaimas(u) – Good morning

## 4. The Sound “ん”

The Japanese “ん” changes slightly depending on the sound that comes after it. Its pronunciation adjusts naturally to make speech smoother.

1. Before B, M, or P sounds → Pronounced as m

さんぽ sanpo – walk                      とんぼ tonbo – dragonfly

2. Before D, T, N, or R sounds → Pronounced as n

みんな minna – everyone              べんとう bentou – lunch box

3. Before G or K sounds → Pronounced as ng (as in “sing”)

まんが manga – comic                      てんき tenki – weather



# Japanese Pitch Accent

## Accent and rhythm

In English, words use stress accent.

The stressed syllable is said stronger, longer, and louder than the others.

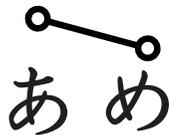
In Japanese, all syllables are spoken at the same speed and length, but with different pitches: high or low. This is called pitch accent.

## 🎵 Examples with Pitch Patterns:

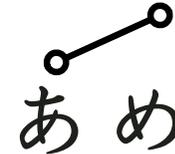
Some words look the same but change meaning with pitch.



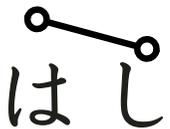
rain



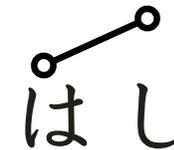
candy



chopsticks



bridge



# カタカナ Katakana



ア a	イ i	ウ u	エ e	オ o
カ ka	キ ki	ク ku	ケ ke	コ ko
サ sa	シ shi	ス su	セ se	ソ so
タ ta	チ chi	ツ tsu	テ te	ト to
ナ na	ニ ni	ヌ nu	ネ ne	ノ no
ハ ha	ヒ hi	フ fu	ヘ he	ホ ho
マ ma	ミ mi	ム mu	メ me	モ mo
ヤ ya		ユ yu		ヨ yo
ラ ra	リ ri	ル ru	レ re	ロ ro
ワ wa				ヲ o
ン n				

カタカナ だくおん・はんだくおん・ようおん

ガ ga	ギ gi	グ gu	ゲ ge	ゴ go
ザ za	ジ zi	ズ zu	ゼ ze	ゾ zo
ダ da	ヂ ji	ヅ zu	デ de	ド do
バ ba	ビ bi	ブ bu	ベ be	ボ bo
パ pa	ピ pi	プ pu	ペ pe	ポ po
ヴァ va	ヴィ vi	ヴ vu	ヴェ ve	ヴォ vo

キャ kya	キュ kyu	キョ kyo
シャ sya	シュ syu	ショ syo
チャ cha	チュ chu	チョ cho
ニャ nya	ニュ nyu	ニョ nyo
ヒャ hya	ヒュ hyu	ヒョ hyo
ミャ mya	ミュ myu	ミョ myo
リャ rya	リュ ryu	リョ ryo

ギャ gya	ギュ gyu	ギョ gyo
ジャ ja	ジュ ju	ジョ jo
ビャ bya	ビュ byu	ビョ byo
ピャ pya	ピュ pyu	ピョ pyo

