

## LESSON NOTES

# Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide #6

## Marking the Change in Japanese Pronunciation with Diacritics

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# GRAMMAR

## The Focus of This Lesson is Japanese Diacritics

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You've learned 46 basic kana sounds so far. In this lesson, you'll learn 23 additional sounds. The characters are familiar, but they are marked. And this changes their pronunciation.

So, now you can pronounce these hiragana characters.

か *ka*, き *ki*, く *ku*, け *ke*, こ *ko*

What about these?

が、ぎ、ぐ、げ、ご

When this little mark is added to the kana, it makes a different sound.

The formal term for this in Japanese is *dakuten*, but it's usually called *tenten*, which means "dot dot."

The *tenten* voices an aspirated sound—let's look at how this works in practice.

The first one is...

が、ぎ、ぐ、げ、ご

These "g" sounds are based on the initial k-group か、き、く、け、こ.

When *tenten* is added to each kana, the "k" sound changes to "g." "K" is an aspirated sound, whereas "g" is voiced. Let's hear them again.

が、ぎ、ぐ、げ、ご

Let's look at some words:

かぎ “key”

かがみ “mirror”

The ぎ in かぎ and が in かがみ are nasal sounds.

When you have a "g" sound such as が or ぎ in the middle of a word or at the end of a word, it's sometimes pronounced with this nasal sound.

This sound is becoming less common, however, especially among young people. Instead, people will pronounce the consonants with a hard "g" sound. However, you might still hear a news reporter or anchor use the nasal pronunciation on TV.

Next we have:

ざ、じ、ず、ぜ、ぞ

They are based on さ、し、す、せ、そ

When "tenten" are added, the s-group sounds become a z-group.

The exception, as you may have guessed, is じ.

し becomes "ji," not "zi."

Next up is...

だ、ぢ、づ、で、ど

These are based on た、ち、つ、て、と

When *tenten* are added, the "t" sound changes to "d."

The exceptions are ぢ and づ.

ち becomes "ji," not "di."

つ becomes "zu," not "du."

Did you notice that we have already had these same sounds, "ji" and "zu" in another row?

They appeared in the "z" row that we learned before.

Both pairs of "ji" and "zu" sound exactly the same.

But, when it comes to writing, they have different kana, such as...

じかん "time"

はなぢ "nosebleed"

じ in じかん and ぢ in はなぢ have the same "ji" sound, but different kana.

ちず map

きづく notice

ず in ちず and づ in きづく have the same "zu" sound, but different kana.

じ and ず are more often used in writing, whereas ぢ and づ are seldomly seen.

Next up is...

ば、び、ぶ、べ、ぼ

They are based on は、ひ、ふ、へ、ほ

When *tenten* are added, the "h" sound changes to a "b" sound.

There is one more set of sounds which is based on は、ひ、ふ、へ、ほ, which is...

ぱ、ぴ、ぷ、ぺ、ぽ

This little circle mark is added, and the "h" sound changes to "p."

The little circle mark is formally called *handakuten*, but usually called *maru* meaning "circle."

Here's a little pronunciation tip for ばびぶべぼ and ぱびぷぺぽ:

In English when you pronounce "b" and "p" sounds, such as "bat" or "put," you breathe out a small puff of air when you pronounce them. In standard Japanese pronunciation, however, the air released is significantly less.

So, try holding your hand in front of your mouth and pronounce ばびぶべぼ or ぱびぷぺぽ again! Do you feel any breath on your hand? Make sure that you're not making a puff of breath.

You've learned 69 sounds so far! You should be familiar with almost all the Japanese sounds now.