

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

How to Write in Japanese: Hiragana and Katakana #11 The Katakana Vowels

11

Hi everyone! Welcome to BASIC JAPANESE WRITING.

The fastest, easiest, and most fun way to master the Japanese alphabet!

You've learned ALL the 46 hiragana characters from the previous lessons. Now it's time to move on to katakana!

Introduction to Katakana and The Katakana Vowels ア, イ, ウ, エ, オ

In this lesson, you'll learn about katakana, how it is different from hiragana, and the five katakana vowels.

Katakana is the exact equivalent of hiragana when it comes to pronunciation. The main difference is their appearance and when they are used.

Katakana characters tend to look more angular. There is also almost nothing in common between how the katakana character looks compared to its hiragana counterpart, except for a few characters.

So why is it that we need to learn 2 basic writing systems when they both sound exactly the same?

The main use of katakana is to differentiate and spell out foreign words using the Japanese syllabary. This makes it easier for Japanese people to know how they are approximately pronounced.

Most country names, foreign names, and all loan words from the modern era are written in katakana.

Katakana is also used to write down onomatopoeia sounds like how you would see sound effects written in Japanese manga!

It is also used to write certain technical or scientific words.

Finally, katakana is also used for emphasis just like how English uses italics.

Ok, time learn your first katakana! Are you ready? Here we go!

This is the katakana character ア (a). ア.

To remember this character, try comparing it with an *A*XE. Do you see it?

Katakana ア is written in 2 strokes.

The first stroke is a horizontal stroke which starts from the left and turns sharply to make a short curve.

The second stroke starts a bit to the top of where the first stroke ends. It goes down, almost touching the end of the first stroke, continues down, and curves to the left.

Try to keep this part centered to keep a good balance.

Ok, let's see it again.

Next up is the Katakana character イ (i). イ.

Think of this character as an *EA*SEL on its side.

Katakana イ is written in 2 strokes.

The first stroke is a curved diagonal line starting from this point and going down to the left end.

The second stroke starts from the middle of the first stroke and goes straight down.

Ok, let's see it again.

The third one is the katakana ウ (u). ウ.

Katakana ウ actually looks an angular version of the hiragana う.

Here's a special use of the "dakuten" unique to katakana. It is added to the character ウ to signify the letter V.

However, there is no "v" sound in Japanese so most people would pronounce this as a "b" sound.

Katakana ヱ is written in 3 strokes.

Instead of a short slanted stroke, start with a short vertical stroke.

Next, draw another short vertical stroke to the left of the first stroke.

For the final stroke, start from where the second stroke started, and draw a long horizontal line touching the end of the first stroke.

When you reach the rightmost part, turn sharply down and make a curve.

Ok, let's see it again.

This is the katakana character **エ** (e). **エ**.

Try imagining this character as *E*LEVATOR doors.

Katakana **エ** is written in 3 strokes.

First, draw a horizontal line on the top.

Then draw the second stroke from the middle of the first stroke down to the bottom.

Finally, draw another horizontal line at the bottom touching the end of the second stroke at the center as well.

Make sure that the third stroke is longer than the first stroke to have a good balance.

Ok, let's see it again.

Now our final character for this lesson – the katakana **オ** (o). **オ**.

To remember **オ**, try to think of it as an *O*PERA singer. "O~~" [singing a high note]

Katakana **オ** is written in 3 strokes.

The first stroke is a long horizontal stroke going from left to right.

The second stroke is a vertical line that intersects the first stroke 1/3 from the right. It ends with a "hane."

The third stroke starts from where the first and second stroke intersect. It's a slightly

curved diagonal line going outward.

Make sure the third stroke doesn't go lower than the second stroke.

Ok, let's see it again.

Unlike hiragana where long vowel sounds are indicated using another vowel character, katakana writing makes use of the "nobashi bō" (伸ばし棒, 一). So instead of writing ア with two ア characters, we would write it like this:

Literally "nobashi bō" (伸ばし棒) means "stretching bar." So when you see it, just remember that you have to stretch the vowel of the character that comes before it.

In order to accommodate more sounds available from foreign words, katakana uses the small versions of the vowel characters to make digraphs outside of those used in Japanese.

For example, since Japanese doesn't have a character for a "wi" or "we" sound, the katakana ウ paired with a small イ or エ is used to denote those sounds: ウィ (wi), ウエ (we).

Because they are digraphs though, they would still be pronounced for the same duration as all the other syllables.

Here are the digraphs you can form using the katakana vowels alone.

イエ (ye), ウィ (wi), ウエ (we), ウォ (wo), ヴァ (va), ヴィ (vi), ヴエ (ve), ヴォ (vo).

Since most Japanese people can't distinguish between the "v" and "b" sounds, these last 4 digraphs tend to also be spelled using the "b" characters: 'ba' (バ), 'bi' (ビ), 'be' (ベ) and 'bo' (ボ).

I'll be teaching you more katakana digraphs, when we encounter the character that the small vowels could be paired up with.

Let's see all the characters again. ア, イ, ウ, ヴ, エ, オ.

Here are the new digraphs as well: イエ, ウィ, ウエ, ウォ, ヴァ, ヴィ, ヴェ, ヴォ.

Now, let's review what you've learned. I'll show you a character or a word and give you time to say them. Ready?

オ.

ぞ. Even though we move on to katakana, don't forget your hiragana characters!

イ. It's like an *EA*SEL on its side.

む. Remember the cow? "Mooooo."

イエ.

ウィ.

ア! This is what Japanese people would say when we realize something. Like ア! I forgot my wallet!

オー! "オー!" on the other hand is what we say when we are amazed.

Great job! Remember, even if foreign words are adapted by Japanese, this doesn't mean they are pronounced the same way as the original word. You still need to pronounce them using the Japanese syllabary in order for Japanese people to understand you.

Ok, let's wrap up this lesson by recapping what you've learned.

In this lesson, you've learned the five katakana vowels: ア, イ, ウ, エ, and オ. You've also learned that the character ウ can be modified by a dakuten to represent the ヴ sound. And also some new digraphs: イエ, ウィ, ウエ, ウォ, ヴァ, ヴィ, ヴェ, and ヴォ.

よくできました! You've now mastered 51 Japanese characters!

Can you guess which delicious word we can make from the katakana characters in the K column?

Find out what it is in the next lesson!

Before you go, practice writing the following words on your own!

ア、イ、ウ、エ、オ

ア！ イー！ ウー... エ！ オー！

エア、イエイ！、ウィー、ウェア、エーアイ

See you in the next lesson! またね！