

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

How to Write in Japanese: Hiragana and Katakana #1 The Hiragana Vowels

#1

Hi everyone! I'm Risa. Welcome to BASIC JAPANESE WRITING.

In this series, I'm going to teach you how to master the Japanese Alphabet in the fastest, easiest, and most fun way!

Did you know? Written Japanese actually uses three different scripts: hiragana, katakana, and kanji.

Hiragana is the basic Japanese alphabet. Contrary to the English alphabet however, each character represents one syllable sound. So every time you see one specific character, you'll know that it will always sound the same way. The second script used in Japanese is Katakana. Each Katakana character represents the same syllable as its Hiragana counterpart. However, it is written a bit differently and is used mostly for foreign words.

These two make up the Japanese alphabet and they will be the focus of this series.

On the other hand, Kanji characters represent a word or a concept. And unlike Hiragana and Katakana, there are *thousands* of them. Plus! There are also different readings for each of them.

This makes Kanji characters harder to master. However, it's important to learn them as well because they're essential in understanding Japanese.

To learn more about Kanji, check out our Kanji series at JapanesePod101.com, which I also host with Alisha.

In this first lesson, we'll be diving into Hiragana, and you'll be learning your first five characters!

Hiragana characters are the most common of the three scripts because it's used to write functional words like grammatical particles and are also commonly found at the end of adjectives and verbs. There are also a lot of words that are more commonly written in Hiragana rather than Kanji. Technically, Hiragana characters could also be used to substitute Kanji characters that you don't know how to write. But don't use this as an excuse not to learn Kanji!

There are 46 Hiragana characters and they are commonly arranged in this order.

Take note that when Japanese is written vertically, you read it from right to left, so we'll be starting with this column.

These five characters are the five vowel sounds in Japanese. The rest of the characters are made up of a consonant sound and one of these vowel sounds – except for the ん character.

Ok, are you ready to learn your first hiragana? Here we go!

This is the hiragana character あ.

To remember this character, try comparing it with an *A*PPLE. Do you see it? Hiragana あ is written in 3 strokes.

The first stroke is a horizontal stroke from left to right. Even though horizontal lines look totally flat in fonts, try writing them at a bit of an angle to make your writing look good. The second stroke is a vertical stroke that cuts the first stroke in half. It starts at the top, and curves outwards and down to the bottom. The third stroke is like a spiral. It starts from the center and curves down to the left. Then it curves back up and to the right, crossing the starting point before finally going back down. Flick your pen at the end of this last stroke. To have a good balance, make sure that there isn't too much space in between the 1st and 3rd stroke. Take note of the spaces made by the third stroke as well. This space should be the smallest, then this loop is a bit larger, and finally the space inside the flip is the largest. Ok, let's see it again.

Next up is the hiragana character い. Think of this character as two i's side by side. *II*! You can actually see い a lot in writing, as it acts like a suffix to most adjectives in Japanese.

Hiragana い is written in 2 strokes.

The first stroke starts from this part. It's like a curved diagonal line. At the bottom it turns sharply upwards. Flick your pen while you finish this stroke. This kind of flicked release with a sharp turn is called a "hane." When you do a "hane," don't put away your pen immediately. It should be as if you're connecting this stroke to the next one.

The second stroke starts from here. It's actually about where you stop to turn if you haven't released your pen from the earlier stroke. Just draw an opposite curving line from the first stroke without the "hane" part. As you can see, this stroke should be shorter than the first one.

It should look like you are enclosing a circle when writing an い.

Ok, let's see it again.

The third one is the hiragana う. To remember this character, imagine a boxer getting punched in the stomach saying "*UGH!*" Hiragana う is written in 2 strokes. First, draw this short slanted line at the top center. For the second stroke, draw an ear shape starting from this point, curving up to the right and then down to the bottom center. Flick your pen at the end of this stroke. Make sure the first stroke is not too big so that your character won't be off-balance.

Ok, let's see it again.

This is the Hiragana character え.

It looks like an *E*NERGETIC ninja! Woosh!

Hiragana え is written in 2 strokes. It starts just like the hiragana う with a short slanted line on the top center. The second stroke goes like this. Look complicated? Just think of writing a number 7, then go back, retrace a bit then make a small wave. Extend the end of the stroke but don't flick your pen. Try your best to keep the same line during the retracing part. This will make your writing neat.

Ok, let's see it again.

Now our final character for this lesson - the Hiragana お. To remember お, try to think of it as a U.F.*O.*!

Take a look at these two characters. Do you remember this character on the left? (pause) That's right! It's the hiragana あ. In order to differentiate Hiragana お from あ, just remember that お has a fl*OA*ting stroke on the side.

お is also often used in writing. But unlike い, お is commonly found at the beginning of words. It is used to imply politeness.

Hiragana お is written in 3 strokes.

It starts in a similar way to Hiragana あ with a short horizontal line, but this time is a bit lower and more to the left. The second stroke starts as a vertical line that cuts the first stroke in half. Then it turns sharply to the left, then turns again to make a big curved line. Flick your pen at the end of this stroke. The third stroke is a small slanted line. It should be located a bit to the top right of the first stroke. The left side of your Hiragana お should be aligned. Keep the proportions of these spaces as well to keep a good

balance. Ok, let's see it again.

Let's see all the characters again. あ, い, う, え, お.

Quiz time!

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

え. Remember the *E*nergetic ninja?

い. Believe it or not, it's actually a word. い means "stomach".

う.

あ・お Which one is the hiragana A? It's the one that looks like an *A*pple and doesn't have a fl*OA*ting stroke. This one!

あい. It means "love".

うえ. This one means "up" or "above".

いいえ. いいえ means "no".

あおい. This means "blue".

Great job! Do you remember when I said Hiragana characters are used to spell out the pronunciation of a Kanji? They are placed above or beside the Kanji and written smaller. This use of Hiragana is called Furigana.

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

In this lesson, you've learned the five Hiragana vowels: あ, い, う, え, and お.

よくできました! You've now mastered your first five characters!

Do you know what "big" is in Japanese? In the next lesson, you'll learn it when you get to know your first batch of consonant-vowel syllables.

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

あい (love)

あう (to meet)

あお (the color blue)

いう (to say)

いえ (house)

うえ (up, above)

おい (nephew)

おう (king)

あおい (blue)

いいえ (no)

See you in the next lesson! またね！