

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide #8

The Secret to Mastering the Japanese Long Vowel

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Hi everyone! I'm Michelle Yamamoto.

Welcome back to The Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide at JapanesePod101.com.

In this lesson, you're going to learn the secret to mastering long vowels in Japanese. You have already learned the short vowels.

あ、い、う、え、お

Long vowels are pronounced for twice as long as short vowels, like...

ああ、いい、うう、ええ、おお、

The meaning of a word can change depending on whether the vowel is long or short.

This is a really important part of Japanese pronunciation!

Okay, let's get started.

The first one is...

ああ

ああ

You say a short vowel あ for one beat, and a long vowel ああ (aa) for two beats.

あ

ああ

Notice how ああ is twice the length of あ.

あ

ああ

For example, the Japanese word for "card" contains a long vowel.

カード カー・ド、カード

When writing in katakana, this mark ("ー") indicates that you need to prolong the vowel of the preceding syllable.

In this case, the vowel "a" in カ should be twice as long to get カード.

The next example is the word for "mark".

マーク, マー・ク, マーク

You need to lengthen the vowel "a" in マ, to get マーク.

Okay, let's try this one.

おかあさん mother, お・か・あ・さ・ん、おかあさん

It's written か・あ. Don't read them separately – read them altogether as かー.

Repeat after me.

おかあさん

おかあさん

The next one is

いい

いい

いい is twice the length of

い。

い

いー

Are you ready for some example words? Here goes!

シート sheet, シー・ト、シート

This mark ("ー") means that you need to prolong the vowel "い" in the preceding syllable, シ (shi).

シート

Next is...

おじいさん grandfather, お・じ・い・さ・ん、おじいさん

You don't say じ・い separately, but read them altogether as じー

おじいさん

Repeat after me.

おじいさん

おじいさん

The next one is...

うう

うう

うう is twice the length of う.

う

うー

Let's pronounce this sound in a series of actual words.

プール pool, プー・ル、プール

すうじ number、す・う・じ、すうじ

Repeat after me.

すうじ

すうじ

The next one is...

ええ

ええ

For example, the word for "cake" is...

ケーキ, ケー・キ、ケーキ

And the word for "teacher" is...

せんせい, せ・ん・せ・い、せんせい

せんせい is made up of syllables せ・ん・せ・い. The last two syllables are not pronounced as せ・い, but as せー. So, a pair of え+ い also makes a long vowel "えー".

To recap, there are two combinations to make a long vowel えー, which are two え sounds and え+

い.

So, can you read this?

えいご English, え・い・ご、えいご

The part of えい is pronounced as えー.

Repeat after me.

えいご

えいご

The next one is...

おお

おお

For example, there is a long vowel in the words...

ノート notebook, ノー・ト、ノート

こうえん park, こ・う・え・ん、こうえん

The first two syllables こ・う are not pronounced as こ・う, but as こー with a long vowel "oo". So, a pair of "お" + "う" also makes a long vowel "おー".

To recap, there are 2 combinations to make a long vowel おー, which are 2 "お" sounds and お+ う.

Repeat after me.

こうえん

こうえん

Why is it important to master long vowels? Because the meaning of a word can change depending on whether the vowel is long or short.

Listen for the difference in these words.

おばさん, おばさん

meaning "aunt"

おばあさん、おばあさん

meaning "grandmother"

When you say おばあさん, extend the vowel "a". If you don't, you'll be saying a different word!

Now listen for the difference in this pair of words.

おじさん、おじさん

meaning "uncle"

おじいさん、おじいさん

meaning "grandfather"

Again, the meaning changes depending on whether the vowel is long or short. Please be careful!

Long vowels are very important in Japanese. Practice pronouncing long vowels for the proper length of time by clapping to measure time.

Do you know which kana is also related to time measurement when it's written in a small size? You'll learn about it in the next

lesson.

Try writing a Japanese long vowel example in the comments.

See you in the next Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide lesson!