

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide #3

Perfect Pronunciation of The 5 Japanese Vowels

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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'll master perfect pronunciation of the 5 Japanese vowels.

There are 5 vowels in Japanese, and their pronunciation doesn't change.

The first vowel is...

あ

Open your mouth a little, relax the tongue and say "ah."

Repeat after me.

あ

あ

The next vowel is...

い

Open the mouth, bring the lips up slightly, and raise the tongue – and say い. Here's a tip: it's like the "ee" in "meet", but shorter. い – raise your tongue almost to the roof of your mouth.

Repeat after me.

い

い

The next vowel is...

う [ɯ]

Purse the lips as if you are going to whistle or say the word "who". Like this う. Try it.

Release a short "u" sound.

う

The lips are more relaxed for the Japanese "u" sound than the English "u." Compare Japanese "u" with English "u".

Repeat after me.

う

う

The next vowel is...

え

Open the mouth, raise the lips up from their natural relaxed position – as if you are about to start smiling – and release the sound, saying "eh".

Repeat after me.

え

え

The final vowel is...

お

Think of the perfect circle of an orange. Round the lips, as if you are surprised, and release a round Japanese

"oh".

Repeat after me.

お

お

Congratulations! You've learned the 5 Japanese vowels. There are many Japanese words made up of vowels alone. Let's practice. Repeat after me!

あい、あ・い、あい

meaning "love".

Pronounce these two vowels separately in two syllables

あい

あい

あお "blue", あ・お、あお

あお

いえ "house", い・え、いえ

いえ

うえ "up", う・え、うえ

うえ

There is one more interesting thing about Japanese vowels.

When you hear someone say a sentence ending in です, such as

わたしはやまもとです。

you might think です is pronounced "dess" instead of "desu".

You are right. The last "u" sound at the end becomes voiceless, and pronounced as "dess".

The vowels "i" and "u" sometimes become voiceless, as in

きく

or

くち

Did you get that the vowel "i" becomes voiceless, in きく?

Also, the vowel "u" in く becomes voiceless in くち.

But, the silent vowels don't always happen. People sometimes say these vowels are voiced, when they speak politely, but it depends on the dialect.

Japanese vowels may seem simple, but mastering them is a crucial first step. Almost every syllable from here is formed on the basis of these vowels. Try practicing each one in a mirror.

Perfect these sounds, because in the next lesson, you'll master the first set of consonants.

Was seeing the pronunciation illustrations helpful? Please comment and share your thoughts.

See you in the next Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide lesson!