

## LESSON NOTES

# Introduction to Japanese #4 Introduction to Japanese Writing

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# GRAMMAR

## The Focus of This Lesson is: Introduction to Japanese Writing

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### The Basics

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In this lesson, you'll learn the basics of Japanese writing.

In English, we use one script - the English Alphabet, to write in English.

To write in Japanese however, you will need to use three different scripts together.

And they are:

- ひらがな
- カタカナ
- 漢字

ひらがな, is like the basic Japanese alphabet.

Instead of 26 letters however, we have 48 characters.

These five characters represent the five vowels in Japanese,

あ、い、う、え、お

All other characters except for one, are made up of a consonant and one of these vowels.

Examples:

か、き、く、け、こ

さ、し、す、せ、そ

カタカナ is almost exactly the same as ひらがな, the only difference is that it's written a little differently.

Examples:

ア、イ、ウ、エ、オ

カ、キ、ク、ケ、コ

ひらがな is more cursive, while カタカナ has a lot of sharp corners.

The final script is 漢字

Kanji is the use of Chinese characters, in Japanese writing.

And this is because Japanese writing actually originated from China.

A long time ago Japan only used Chinese characters.

Today, we use all three scripts together to write Japanese.

Unlike

ひらがな and カタカナ though, 漢字 is nothing like an alphabet.

Kanji characters are a special type of character that represents an idea or concept. They act more like entire words than individual letters. And unlike the alphabet, there are thousands and thousands of Kanji characters.

Not to mention, there are many different ways you can read them too. So the pronunciation actually changes according to the context.

Now let's look at each script in a little more detail.

## **Hiragana**

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You can think of ひらがな as the default script used to write most things in Japanese. It's the most common of the three scripts because it's used to write functional words, including most grammatical particles, such as possessive...

の

私のペン。

prepositions...

に

学校にいる。

as a subject marker...

は

ジョンは学生です。

And it can also be used to write words that lack a kanji rendition, or whose kanji is obscure, or considered too difficult for the reader to understand.

Additionally, it's used as inflectional endings for adjectives and verbs together with kanji.

見る、押す、白い、古い

In theory, you could use this script to write everything in Japanese.

For this reason, it's generally best to learn ひらがな first.

## **Katakana**

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We mentioned before that カタカナ is exactly the same as ひらがな, the only difference is that it looks slightly different.

This is the least common of the three scripts because it's used to write foreign words and names...

コンピューター、ビール、ロンドン、ジョン

and onomatopoeic sounds...

ワンワン、ニャン

It's common to learn カタカナ after you learn ひらがな because of their similarities.

## **Kanji**

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The final script is kanji, which is undoubtedly the hardest one of all to learn. Kanji is used to write most words of native Japanese, or of historically Chinese origin. This includes most nouns...

人、学校

the stems of most verbs and adjectives...

見る、行く、赤い、怖い

and most personal and place names...

田中、博子、東京、大阪

Learning kanji may be difficult since there are thousands and thousands of them. They are, however, an integral part of Japanese writing.