

LESSON NOTES

Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide #3 Perfect Pronunciation of The 5 Japanese Vowels

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of the Lesson is Mastering Japanese Vowels

First we will go over Japanese vowels, which is one of the easiest areas of pronunciation. English has the same five vowels as Japanese (a, e, i, o, and u), but if you consider all of the ways you can pronounce English vowels, you end up with twenty different sounds! In Japanese, the sounds that the vowels make do not change. They sound very similar to the vowels found in Spanish or Italian. Let's take a look at them:

1. **a** - pronounced "ah," like the "a" in "father"
2. **e** - pronounced "eh," like the "e" in "net"
3. **i** - pronounced "ee," like the "ee" in "meet"*
4. **o** - pronounced "oh," like the first part of the "o" sound in "so"
5. **u** - pronounced "oo," like the "oo" in "mood," but with the lips less rounded*

Devoicing

There is one small exception for the pronunciations of "i" and "u" that we will call devoicing. That means that they become almost "whispered." This happens when these vowels come between two of the voiceless consonants: p, t, k, s, or h. For example, in words like shika ("deer") and hiku ("to pull"), the "i" sound is almost inaudible. This regularly occurs at the ends of the grammatical endings desu and masu as well, which are pronounced [dess] and [mahs], respectively.