

日本語能力試験勉強本

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第○部

初心者級

第 1 章

はつおん 発音

1.1 ローマ^じ字

This section will introduce the concept of ローマ^じ字, which when written in ローマ^じ字 is rendered as ‘Rōmaji.’ This is the method of writing Japanese words using Roman characters. Hence the name, Rome letters. We are starting with this, as Chapter 2 will introduce the Japanese scripts in relation to Romaji^[v].

To begin with, let’s talk about how Romaji works. There are five vowel sounds, and many consonant sounds. For the most part, they are pronounced exactly the same as you would see in English. The most important part when talking about pronunciation is that each sound is pronounced the same way when it shows up, and that there is no intonation - that is to say it is a ‘flat’ language^[z].

First off, let’s talk about the five vowel sounds:

- **a** — pronounce it like the ‘ow’ in ‘how’, however only take the first part of that ‘ow’. As you say the word ‘how’, note how you glide between two sounds for that ‘ow’, only say that first half that sits lower in your mouth and before you start

^[v]Specifically, we will be using Hepburn Rōmaji, the Kunrei system will be touched on briefly in Chapter 2

^[z]This is not entirely true, it is a useful simplification for teaching, the truest series of answers will be revealed over time.

to round you lips.

- **i** — pronounce it like the ‘ee’ in ‘meet’
- **u** — pronounce it like the ‘oo’ in ‘shoot’
- **e** — pronounce it like the ‘e’ in ‘bet’
- **o** — pronounce it like the ‘o’ in ‘story’, however take only the first part of that ‘o’. As you say the word ‘story’ note how you glide between two sounds for that ‘o’, only say that first half that sits more back in your mouth and before you start to round your lips.

Most of them are identical to English sounds you know, just make sure for the a and o to only get that first half of that English sound hint. However, the vowels here can exist in short and long variants. We differentiate them by using a line over the long vowels, the only exception will be a long-i sound, that is transcribed as ‘ii.’ So they will be transcribed as: ‘ā’, ‘ii’, ‘ū’, ‘ē’, ‘ō.’ A long vowel is pronounced identically to the short vowel, just takes double the time to say.

Now let us move onto the consonants, I will be going through them in groups. First off, the simple single consonants:

- **k** — pronounce this like the ‘k’ in ‘skate’
- **g** — pronounce this like the ‘g’ in ‘again’
- **s** — pronounce this like the ‘s’ in ‘soup’
- **z** — pronounce this like the ‘z’ in ‘zoo’
- **t** — pronounce this like the ‘t’ in ‘stop’
- **d** — pronounce this like the ‘d’ in ‘today’
- **n** — pronounce this like the ‘n’ in ‘not’
- **h** — pronounce this like the ‘h’ in ‘hat’
- **b** — pronounce this like the ‘b’ in ‘about’
- **p** — pronounce this like the ‘p’ in ‘span’
- **m** — pronounce this like the ‘m’ in ‘much’

- **r** — pronounce this like a Canadian would say the ‘d’ in ‘trader,’ this is the hardest sound to get right, it is a quick slap of that ridge in your mouth, a normal English ‘r’ works fine for the most part but that is the most correct way to say it.
- **y** — pronounce this like the ‘y’ in ‘yacht’

Now for the weird consonant clusters:

- **sh** — pronounce it like the ‘sh’ in ‘sheep’
- **ch** — pronounce it like the ‘ch’ in ‘cheap’
- **j** — pronounce it like the ‘j’ in ‘jeep’
- **ts** — pronounce it like the ‘ts’ in ‘cats’
- **zu** — pronounce it like the ‘ds’ in ‘cards,’ note that this applies only for the ‘z’ followed by a ‘u’
- **f** — pronounce it like the ‘ph’ in ‘phew!’

Lastly some consonants can have a ‘y’ stuck on the end of them, here they are:

- **ky** — pronounce it like the ‘k’ in ‘skew’
- **gy** — pronounce it like the ‘g’ in ‘argue’
- **ny** — pronounce it like the ‘ny’ in ‘canyon’
- **by** — pronounce it like the ‘b’ in ‘rebutal’
- **py** — pronounce it like the ‘p’ in ‘spew’
- **my** — pronounce it like the ‘m’ in ‘mute’
- **ry** — just like with the solo ‘r,’ this one is hard to do justice in words, try to go straight from the ‘r’ to a ‘y’ sound

Then you have the weird one allocated to the very very end. The solo ‘n’. It is hard to accurately describe how to pronounce it, as its pronunciation changes based on its context. It is most times just a generic nasal sound, think of something like ‘mmmmm’ but open your mouth while saying it. To avoid confusion when this ‘n’ is next to a ‘y’, we may differentiate like so: ‘kon’yaku’ vs ‘nyūgaku.’

第 2 章

かな

Kana are Japanese's equivalent to an alphabet. Rōmaji used English phonology and writing to make the writing more accessible, however this chapter will delve into Kana, how to use them, when to use them, and how they mirror Rōmaji.

2.1 ひらがな

Hiragana is the main syllabary used for Japanese writing. Everything can be written entirely in hiragana, but the other scripts are just as important. Below, are the basic letters used for hiragana writing. Note that this table is read right to left, top to bottom.

N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	—	
ん	わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ	A
		り		み	ひ	に	ち	し	き	い	I
		る	ゆ	む	ふ	ぬ	つ	す	く	う	U
		れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え	E
		を	ろ	よ	も	ほ	の	と	そ	こ	O

This table is constructed to mirror how Rōmaji works. The kana そ, which lies at the intersection of S and O, is read ‘so.’ The kana ん all on its own is that weird ‘n’ talked about at the end of Section 1.1. There *are* a few exceptions however. し is read as ‘shi,’ ち is read as ‘chi,’ and つ is read as ‘tsu.’ This means that ‘si,’ ‘ti,’ and ‘tu’ all can not be written using these basic kana.

There are a few more things to touch on past the basic kana. They can be marked in a way that changes their sounds as shown below:

P	B	D	Z	G	
ぱ	ば	だ	ぎ	が	A
び	び	ぢ	じ	ぎ	I
ぶ	ぶ	づ	ず	ぐ	U
ぺ	べ	で	ぜ	げ	E
ぽ	ぼ	ど	ぞ	ご	O

Much like with the original set of hiragana, じ, ぢ, and づ all do not fall nicely into the pattern. However ず is also included in this. じ, and ぢ are pronounced ‘ji’. づ, and ず are pronounced ‘zu.’ Though do remember that this is the exceptional ‘zu’ where it is pronounced like the ‘ds’ in ‘goods’ followed by the ‘u’ vowel.

Lastly we have the rest of the sounds, those are formed by sticking a small Y-column kana at the end. They are responsible for a lot of the inserted ‘y’s in Section 1.1. They are shown below:

P	Y	B	Y	J	^[v]	G	Y	R	Y	M	Y	H	Y	N	Y	C	H	S	H	K	Y	
ぴ	ゃ	び	ゃ	じゃ		ぎ	ゃ	り	ゃ	み	ゃ	ひ	ゃ	に	ゃ	ちゃ		しゃ		きゃ		A
ぴ	ゅ	び	ゅ	じゅ		ぎ	ゅ	り	ゅ	み	ゅ	ひ	ゅ	に	ゅ	ちゅ		しゅ		きゅ		U
ぴ	ょ	び	ょ	じょ		ぎ	ょ	り	ょ	み	ょ	ひ	ょ	に	ょ	ちょ		しょ		きょ		O

This now covers all the main hiragana. As it is the evergreen syllabary, the use of katakana will mainly be in contrast to the use of hiragana.

2.2 カタカナ

Katakana functions identically to hiragana in its structure. The charts, identical in structure to hiragana, are shown below. Note that the sound shifts in Section 2.1 are also present.

^[v]Note that you may also represent these sounds by swapping じ for ぢ. However this is the rarest kana.

P	B	D	Z	G	N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	ー	
パ	バ	ダ	ザ	ガ		ワ	ラ	ヤ	マ	ハ	ナ	タ	サ	カ	ア	A
ピ	ビ	ヂ	ジ	ギ			リ		ミ	ヒ	ニ	チ	シ	キ	イ	I
プ	ブ	ツ	ズ	グ	ン		ル	ユ	ム	フ	ヌ	ツ	ス	ク	ウ	U
ペ	ベ	テ	ゼ	ゲ			レ		メ	ヘ	ネ	テ	セ	ケ	エ	E
ポ	ボ	ド	ゾ	ゴ		ヲ	ロ	ヨ	モ	ホ	ノ	ト	ソ	コ	オ	O

P	Y	B	Y	J	G	Y	R	Y	M	Y	H	Y	N	Y	C	H	S	H	K	Y	
ピャ	ビャ	ヂャ	ギャ				リャ	ミャ	ヒャ	ニャ	チャ	シャ	キャ								A
ピュ	ビュ	ヂュ	ギュ				リュ	ミユ	ヒユ	ニユ	チュ	シュ	キュ								U
ピョ	ビョ	ヂョ	ギョ				リョ	ミョ	ヒョ	ニョ	チョ	ショ	キョ								O

However, there are additional kana that are used most commonly in katakana. Katakana tends to be used more for transcribing words and sounds that are not from Japanese itself. Things like loanwords and sound effects. This leads to an entirely new structure of sticking small vowels next to some sound shifted letters to find a way to write sounds that we previously couldn't in Japanese. Take the hit game series 「ファイナル・ファンタジー」, typically written in English as 'Final Fantasy.' We would pronounce that as 'fainaru fantajii.' That 「ファ」 is read as 'fa.'

The other thing to talk about that katakana tends to do differently from hiragana, is the 「ー」. This is called the vowel extension mark, or 「ちょうおんぷ」 (*chōonpu*). It causes the vowel before it to be extended. This can also be used in hiragana as is typically seen in the word 「らーめん」, though that is a loanword from Chinese that has been adapted into Japanese.

The table for long and short vowels is shown below, with the entries being written in the script that they are most commonly found in.

Always Long	Sometimes Long	
アー ああ		Ā
イー いい		Ī
ウー うう		Ū
エー ええ	えい	E
オー おお	おう	Ō

第 3 章

ぶんぽう 文法

3.1 じょし 助詞

3.2 かつよう 活用

第 4 章

かんじ 漢字

4.1 か じゅん 書き順

4.2 ぶしゅ 部首

4.3 よ 読み