



Question 2 - Japaneasy (10 marks)

Japanese is written using a variety of scripts including Chinese characters. But for the purposes of learning to read, and in the case of unusual words, it is quite common to use a phonetic system, *hiragana*. Shown below on the left are eight examples of simple Japanese words, with their pronunciation in a random order on the right. English meanings are also given but for information only – they play no part in solving this problem.

- 2.1.** (4 marks) Use the table in the answer sheet to show how the words on the left correspond to the pronunciations on the right.

1. あか	A. kita ‘north’
2. さと	B. kao ‘face’
3. でんき	C. denki ‘electricity’
4. あさ	D. tsudo ‘every time’
5. かつどん	E. asa ‘morning’
6. かお	F. katsudon ‘pork and rice’
7. きた	G. aka ‘red’
8. つど	H. sato ‘village’

- 2.2.** (3 marks) How would you pronounce the following Japanese words?

- (a) おでき ‘eruption’
(b) だん ‘group’

- 2.3.** (3 marks) How would you write the following words in *hiragana*?

- (a) satsu ‘banknote’
(b) kanten ‘point of view’



Answer blank

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2.1	Japanese	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
	English									
2.2	a									
	b									
2.3	a									
	b									



Answers and marks

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2.1	Japanese	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	@0.5
	English	G	H	C	E	F	B	A	D	
2.2	a	odeki								1
	b	dan								2
2.3	a	さつ								1
	b	かんてん								2



Teacher tips

Way in: The longest Hiragana form presumably corresponds to the longest pronunciation; so Hiragana 5, with four characters, presumably has pronunciation F, katsudon.

Now how can you use four characters to represent a pronunciation written with 8 letters? Guess: each character shows a syllable – a combination of a consonant followed by a vowel. (This is obvious if you already know that some writing systems work like that.) So the first Hiragana character means ‘ka’ and the second ‘tsu’. But that leaves a single syllable, ‘don’, with two characters. Guess: since all the other syllables are ‘open’ (i.e. there’s no final consonant), maybe the final consonant ‘n’ gets a separate character. So the third character is ‘do’ and the fourth ‘n’.

If your guesses are right, they’ll guide you to a sensible solution; but of course they may be wrong, so keep an open mind until you’ve checked the rest of the data. For example, the guess about ‘n’ is immediately confirmed when you look for other words containing ‘n’, and you find just one pronunciation (C. denki) and one Hiragana form with the ‘n’ character in just the right place. Now you’ve cracked the characters in ‘katsudon’, all the other characters will be easy to pin down.

Turning to the questions, most of them can be answered directly on the basis of the available data. BUT two can’t. These are 2.2b and 2.3b, both of which raise the same difficulty: how to go beyond the basic data to see if you understand the principles behind the correspondences. 2.2b includes a Hiragana character that’s not in the basic data, but it’s built out of the TA symbol plus a little equals sign. If you look at the other characters, you’ll also find the little equals sign on DO, which is otherwise identical to TO, and also on DE, though there’s no corresponding character without it. What you have to do is to see the pattern here, and complete the analogy:

TO : DO :: 1 : DE :: TA : 2

What is '2'? Once you see it laid out like that, it's obvious that 2 = DA. Likewise in 2.3b, where you need the character for TE, which isn't in the basic data. But the pattern tells you that 1 = TE, so you simply remove the little equals sign from DE, and you have the solution.

A lot of UKLO problems take you up onto a higher level of difficulty by going beyond the basic data in this way, and what you’re always looking for is some kind of underlying pattern or rationale in the system. I.e. Step 1 takes you from basic data to part of the system, then Step 2 takes you, via general patterns, to other parts of the system.