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Learn Hiragana

by TOFUGU

WHAT IS HIRAGANA ?

Hiragana are a type of Japanese character. They're sort of like a Japanese alphabet, in that each hiragana character is used to represent a sound. That means that by learning hiragana characters, you'll also learn basic Japanese pronunciation! In essence, remembering hiragana is the first step to learning Japanese.

AN OVERVIEW OF HIRAGANA

There are 46 basic hiragana in total, typically presented in these ten columns.

	K	S	T	N	H	M	Y	R	W
あ A	か KA	さ SA	た TA	な NA	は HA	ま MA	や YA	ら RA	わ WA
い I	き KI	し SHI	ち CHI	に NI	ひ HI	み MI		り RI	
う U	く KU	す SU	つ TSU	ぬ NU	ふ FU	む MU	ゆ YU	る RU	を O
え E	け KE	せ SE	て TE	ね NE	へ HE	め ME		れ RE	
お O	こ KO	そ SO	と TO	の NO	ほ HO	も MO	よ YO	ろ RO	ん N

The first column consists of five vowels: あ (A) – い (I) – う (U) – え (E) – お (O).
The rest of the hiragana pair one of these vowels with a consonant sound. Take a look at the second column, the K-column. It includes か (KA) – き (KI) – く (KU) – け (KE) – こ (KO). See how they're just "K" sounds combined with the five vowels from the first column?
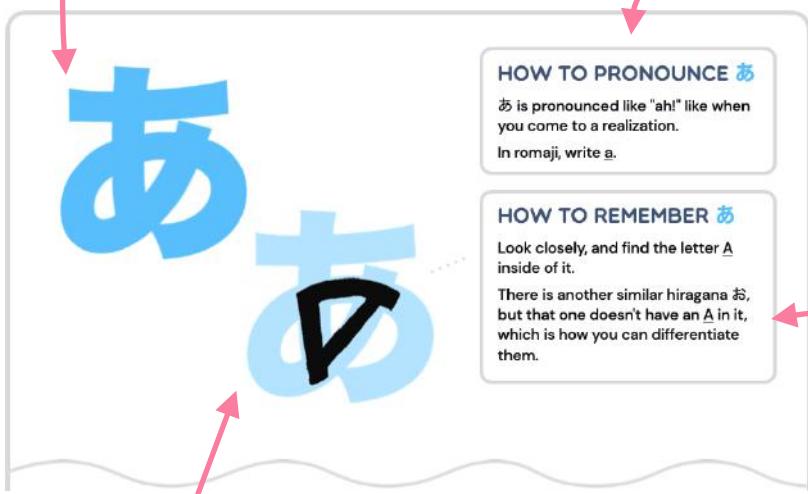
This pattern gives us all the columns for K – S – T – H – M – Y – R – W sounds, and as you can see from the chart, they (almost) all follow the same rule. You may notice some exceptions, but don't worry — you'll learn about those later in this book.

HOW TO USE THE LEARN HIRAGANA BOOK

PAGE FOR EACH HIRAGANA

This is the kana (hiragana) you'll be learning on the page.

HOW TO PRONOUNCE あ

あ is pronounced like "ah!" like when you come to a realization.

In romaji, write a.

HOW TO REMEMBER あ

Look closely, and find the letter A inside of it.

There is another similar hiragana お, but that one doesn't have an A in it, which is how you can differentiate them.

THE HOW TO PRONOUNCE section explains how to say the kana.
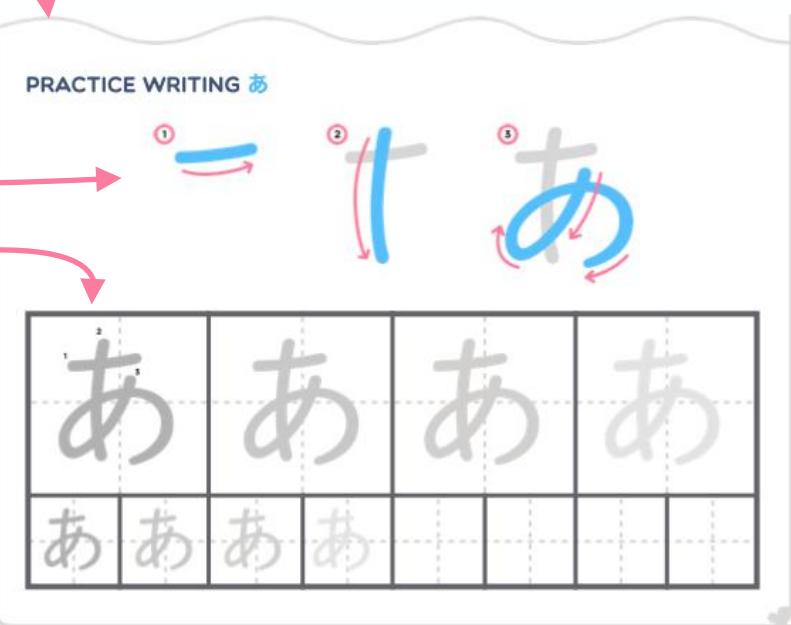
It also tells you how to write the kana in romaji (a system that transliterates Japanese into English letters). Pay attention to the romaji spelling, as you'll be quizzed later on!

THE HOW TO REMEMBER section gives you a "memory hint," a.k.a. a mnemonic, to help you link the shape and the reading of the kana. You may find some quirky ones, but believe me — they'll help the kana stick to your brain!

This is a supplemental image to the HOW TO REMEMBER section. It visually illustrates how the memory hint works.

The bottom half of the page is the PRACTICE WRITING section.

This shows the stroke order for writing the kana. As for stroke direction, keep in mind that the basic rule is left to right, top to bottom.

PRACTICE WRITING あ

Do some practice writing the kana, tracing over the lines first, then filling in the blank boxes! At this stage, writing is not as important as being able to read, but moving your hand and practicing writing will help you remember the kana.

REVIEW PAGE FOR EACH COLUMN

After you learn a set/column of kana, you'll see a page called **LET'S PRACTICE READING!** where you can review what you've learned.

Here in the boxes below each kana, just fill in the romaji reading of the corresponding kana.

This helps you self-assess and see how much you have (or haven't) retained.

If you find yourself having a hard time remembering a specific kana, you can always go back to that kana's page to review.

You can also try to come up with memory hints of your own if that works better for you!
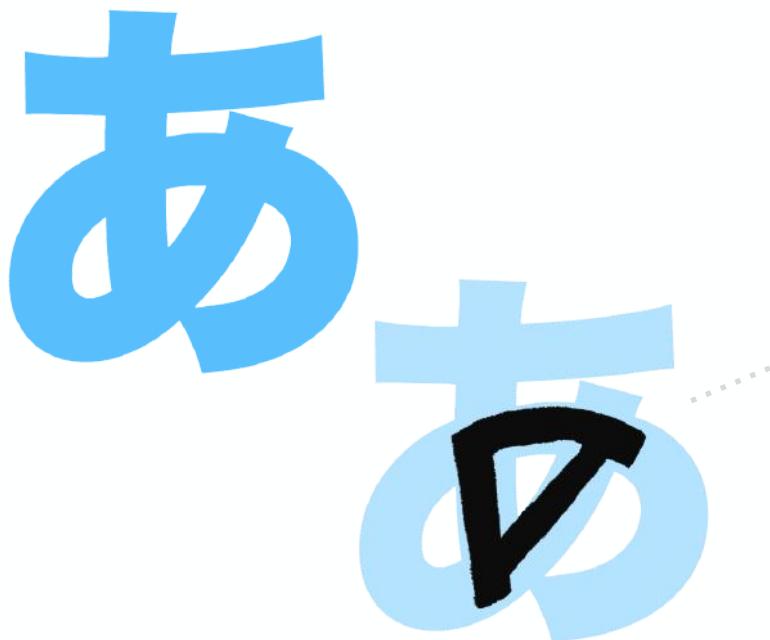
The reading quiz continues! Keep filling in the kana readings in romaji.

What's different (and kind of cool) in this part is that the kana are used for making actual Japanese words. You'll realize that you already know how to read some Japanese words in hiragana!

Each word contains at least one kana from the column you're reviewing, but keep in mind that you may see some kana from previous columns being used as well.

So when you're using this book, try to follow the order it's in to get the most out of it.

— Are you ready to learn all the hiragana now? Good luck!

あ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE あ

あ is pronounced like "ah!" like when you come to a realization.
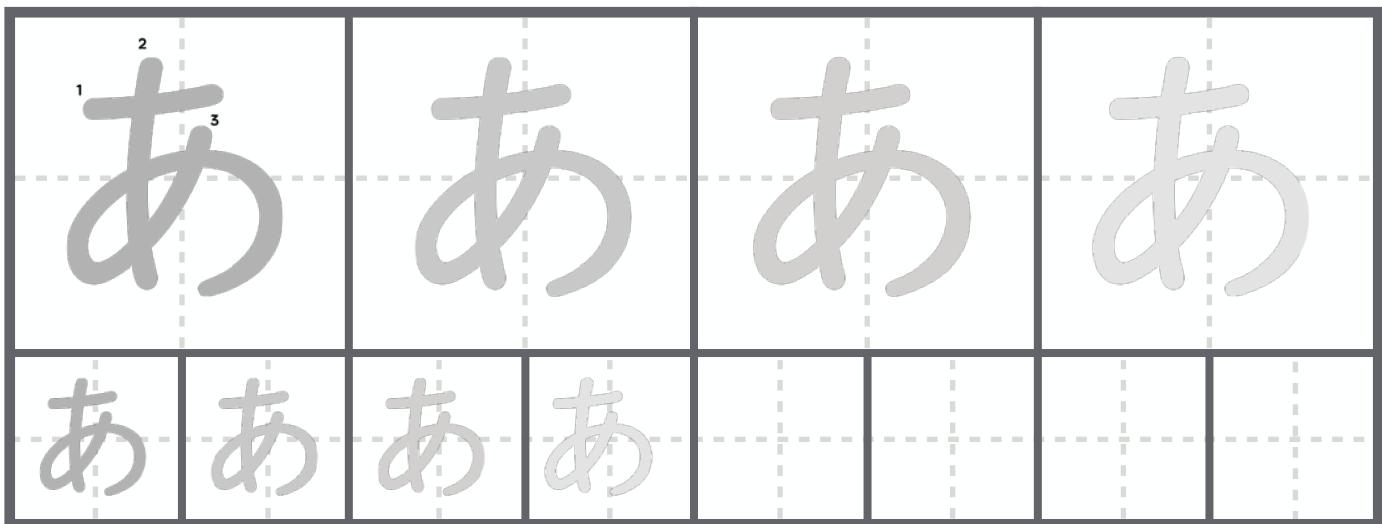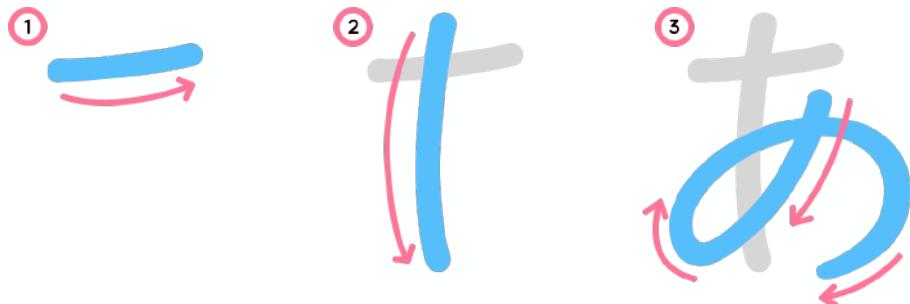
In romaji, write <u>a</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER あ
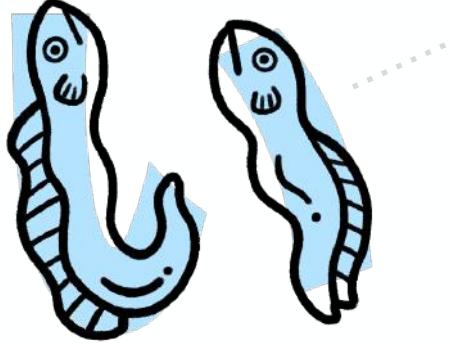
Look closely, and find the letter <u>A</u> inside of it.

There is another similar hiragana, お, but that one doesn't have an <u>A</u> in it, which is how you can differentiate them.

PRACTICE WRITING あ

① ② ③

あ あ あ あ

あ あ あ あ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE い

い is pronounced like the <u>ee</u> in "<u>ee</u>l."
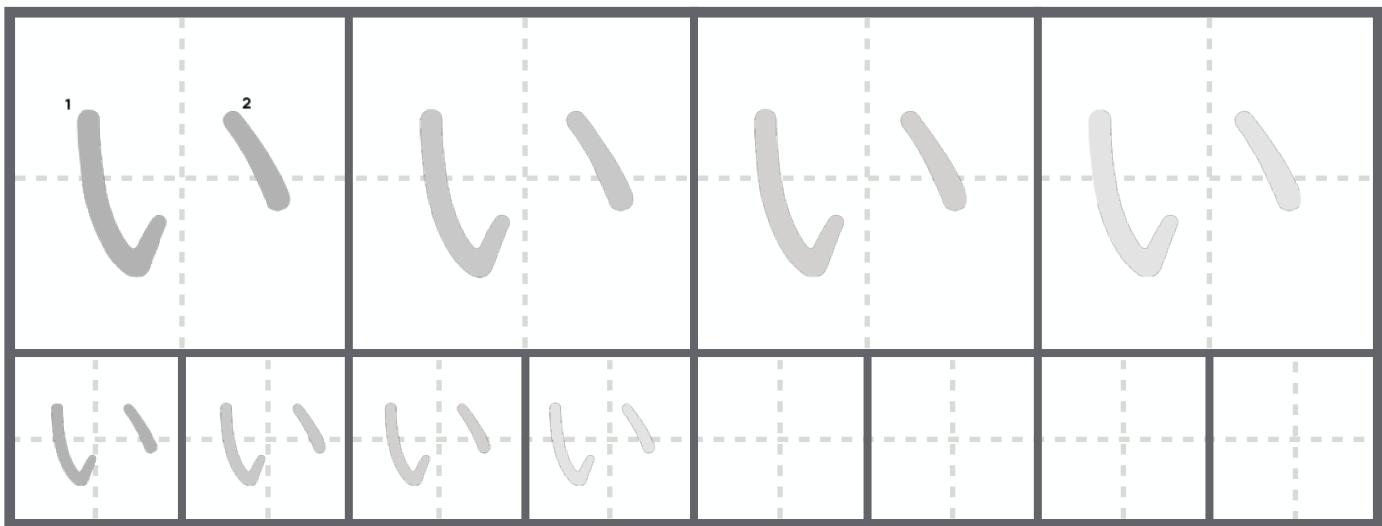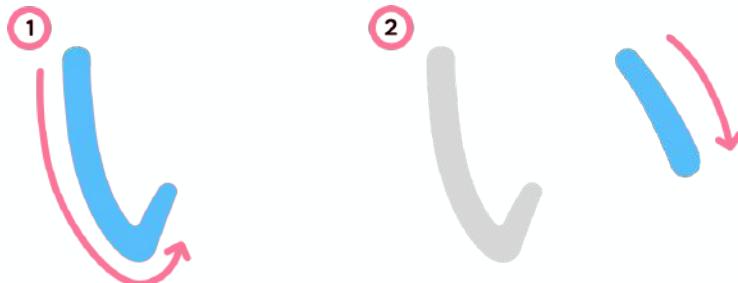
In romaji, write <u>i</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER い

To remember this kana, just think of a couple of <u>ee</u>ls hanging out.

They're upright because they're trying to mimic the letter i, which also stands upright and happens to be the way you spell out this character in romaji.

PRACTICE WRITING い

HOW TO PRONOUNCE う

う is pronounced like <u>ooh</u> in "<u>ooh</u>, ahh!"

In other words, it sounds like <u>u</u> in "<u>U</u>NO," the card game, or the number one in Spanish.
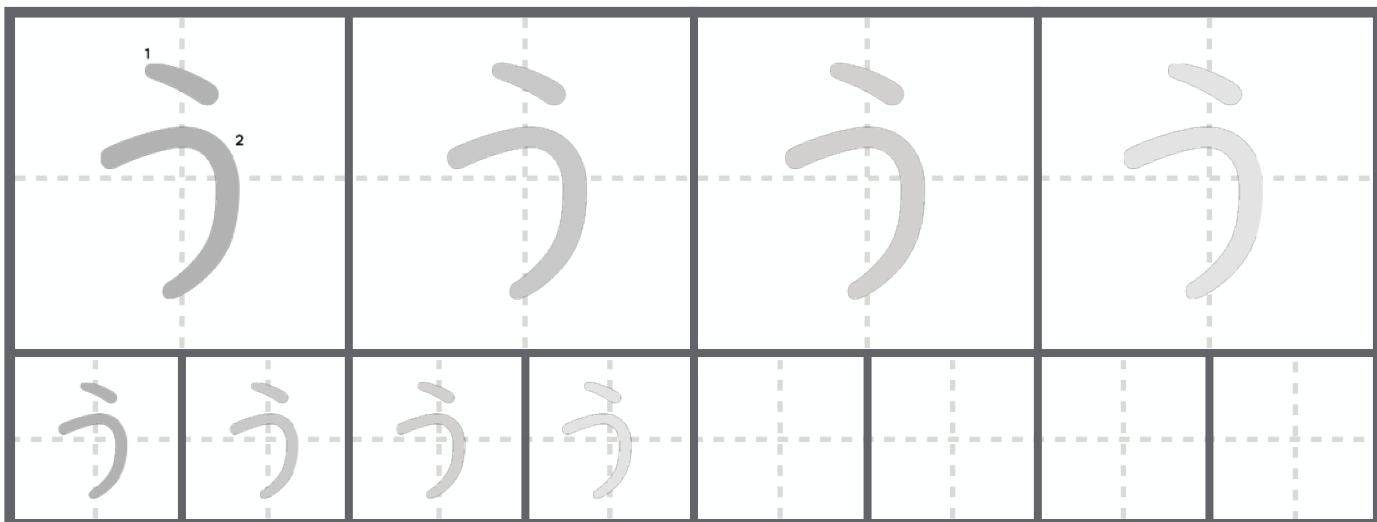
In romaji, write <u>u.</u>

HOW TO REMEMBER う
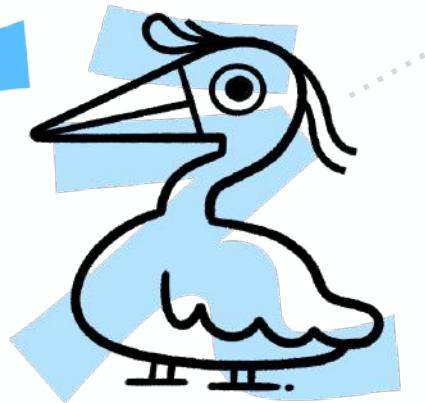
To remember this kana, notice the <u>U</u> shape right in it!

There's another similar hiragana, つ, but that one isn't wearing a hat like <u>U</u> (you) are. Ooh, ahh, what a nifty hat!

PRACTICE WRITING う

え

HOW TO PRONOUNCE え

え is pronounced like the <u>e</u> in "egg."
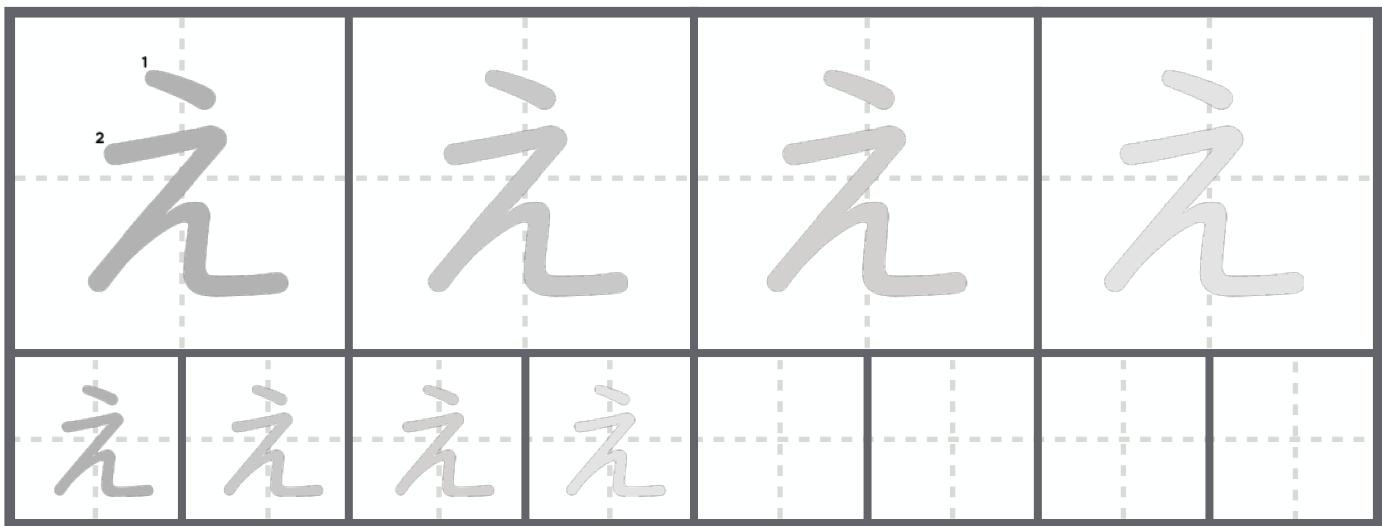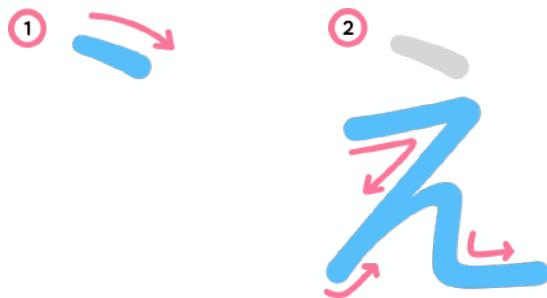
In romaji, write <u>e.</u>
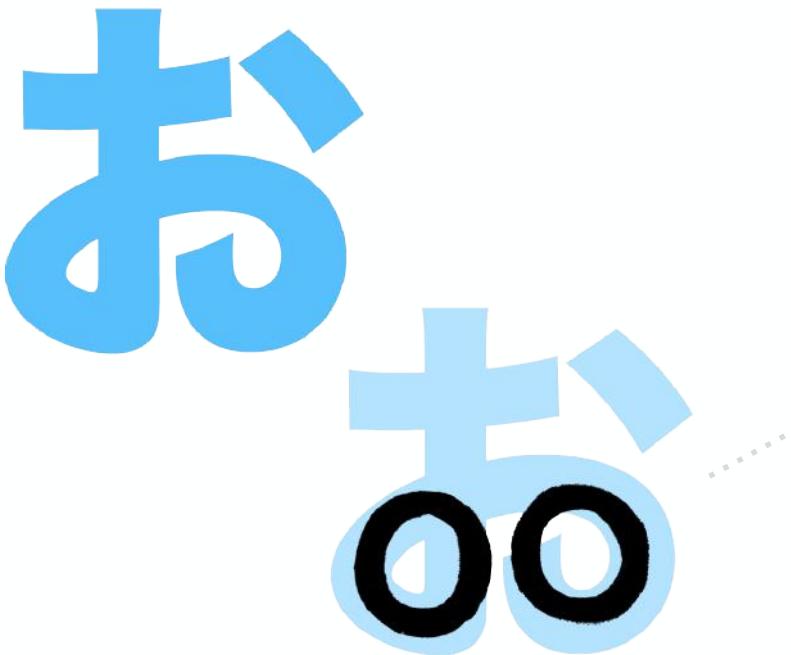
HOW TO REMEMBER え

Look at this kana and find the <u>e</u>xotic bird laying <u>e</u>xotic <u>e</u>ggs inside of it.

The feather on its head gives away that it's special and exotic, and the flourish looks like its body and tail. How adorable!

PRACTICE WRITING え

お

HOW TO PRONOUNCE お

お is pronounced like you're saying "oh." It's the o sound in "origami."
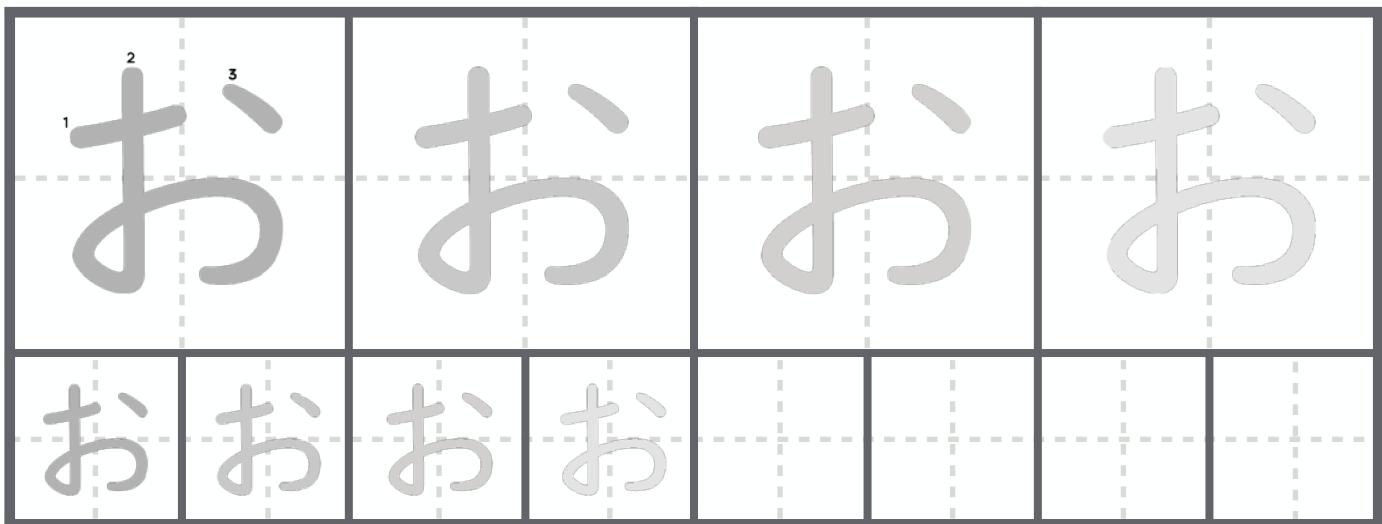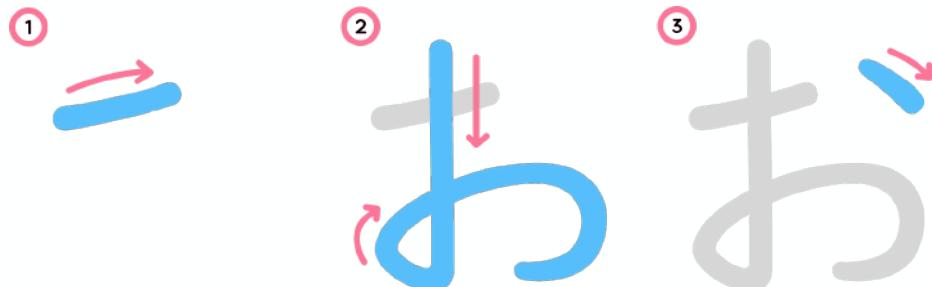
In romaji, write o.

HOW TO REMEMBER お

Can you see the letter o in here, two times? This one looks similar to あ, except for one key difference: there are two letter o symbols visible in there.

Make sure you use this to differentiate this kana お and the similar kana あ.

PRACTICE WRITING お

① ② ③
お お

お お お お

お お お お

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

お	い	あ	お	え	い	う	え	お	あ

あ
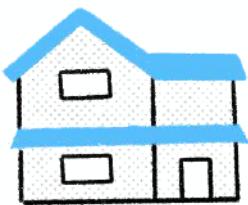
あ！means <u>ah!</u> — something you say when you come to a realization.

あ お

あお means <u>blue</u>.

い え

いえ means <u>house</u>.

う え

うえ means <u>above</u>.

お う

おう means <u>king</u>.

か

HOW TO PRONOUNCE か

か is just the K sound plus あ, making a ka sound. It's pronounced like ka in "karma."

In romaji, write ka.

HOW TO REMEMBER か

See how this kana looks like a mosquito? What a convenient coincidence! Mosquitos happen to be called か (ka) in Japanese. You also say "cut it out, darn mosquito!" when they try to suck your blood, so that should be easy to remember.

PRACTICE WRITING か

き

HOW TO PRONOUNCE き

き is just the <u>K</u> sound plus い, making a <u>ki</u> sound. It's pronounced <u>kee</u>, just like the word "<u>key</u>."
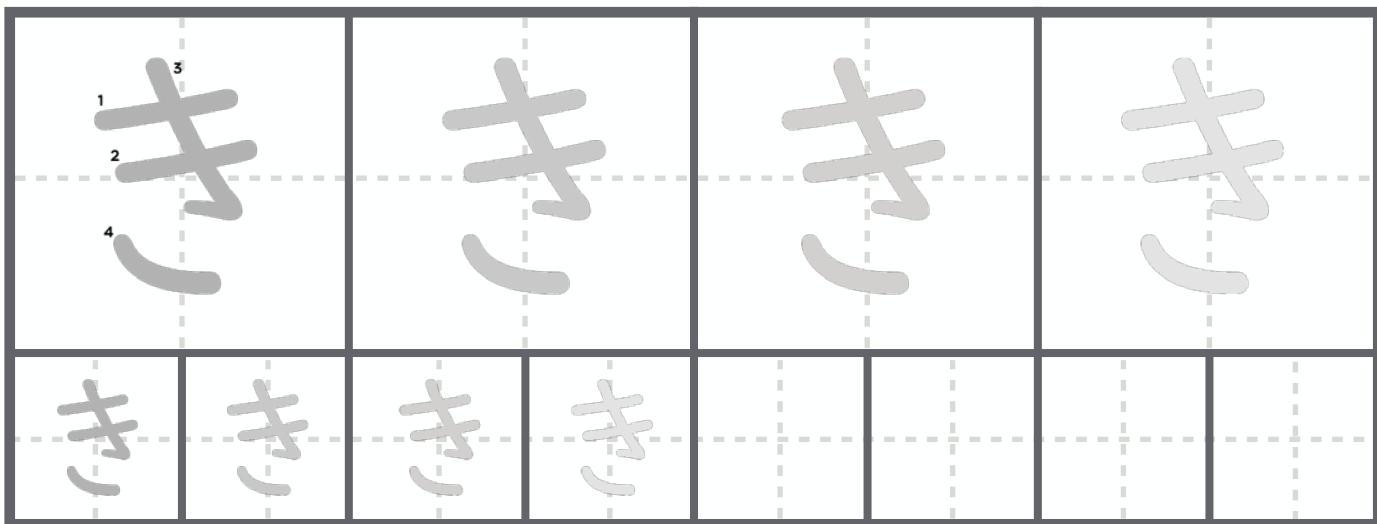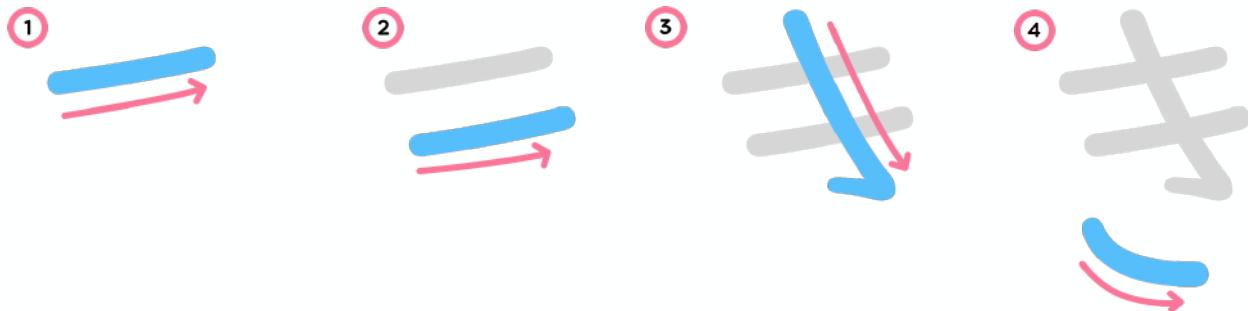
In romaji, write <u>ki</u>.
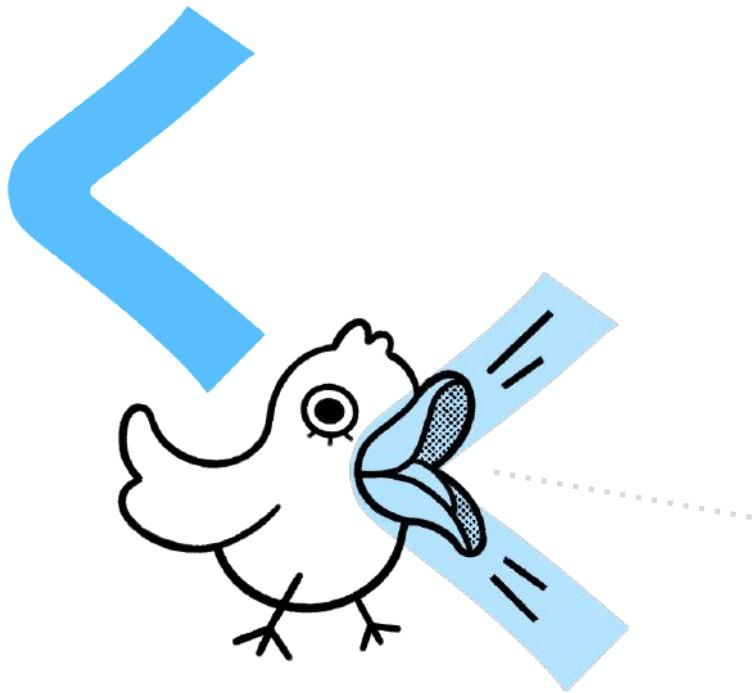
HOW TO REMEMBER き

Notice how the shape of き resembles a <u>key</u>?

Note: In some fonts, the bottom part is detached from the main part. For example: き. The pronunciation is still <u>ki</u> though!

PRACTICE WRITING き

HOW TO PRONOUNCE く

く is just the <u>K</u> sound plus う, making a <u>ku</u> sound.
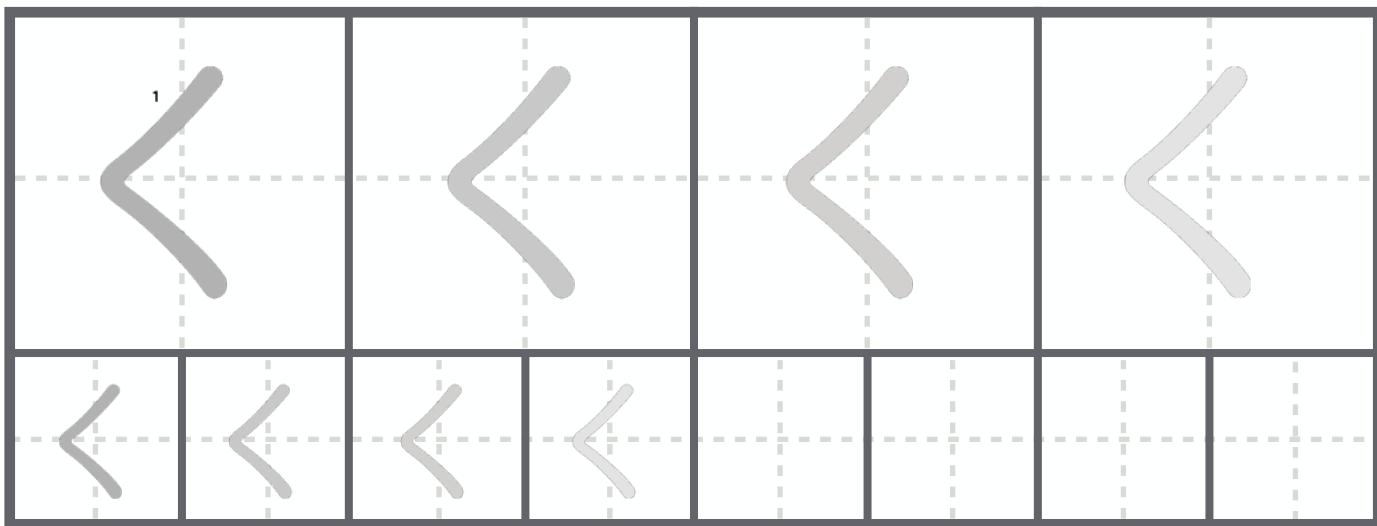
It's pronounced <u>coo</u>, like both syllables of the word "<u>cuckoo</u>" (or just the first syllable, depending on your variety of English).

In romaji, write <u>ku</u>.
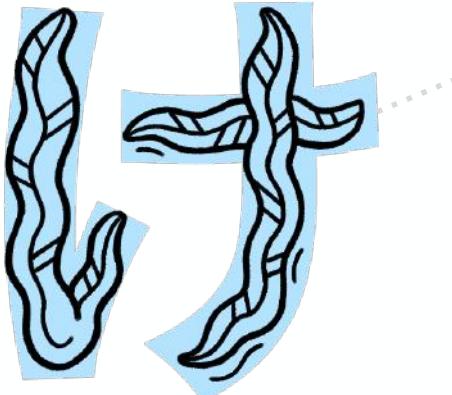
HOW TO REMEMBER く

To remember this, think of this kana being the mouth of a <u>coo</u>-coo / <u>cu</u>ckoo bird popping out and saying "<u>ku</u> ku, ku ku!".

PRACTICE WRITING く

け

HOW TO PRONOUNCE け

け is just the K sound plus え, making a ke sound.
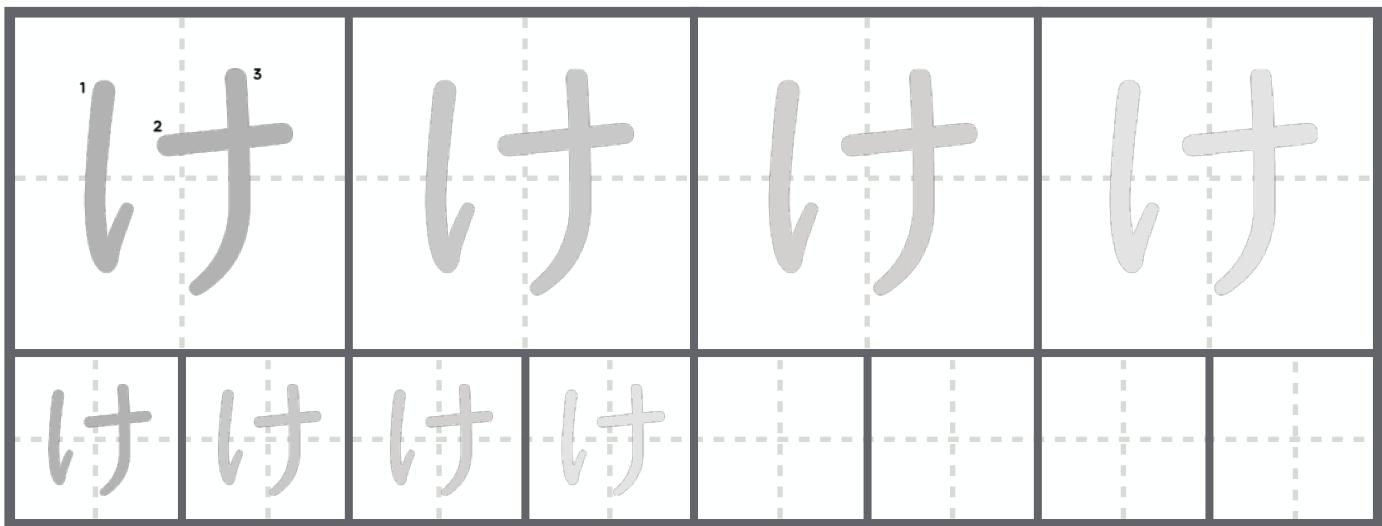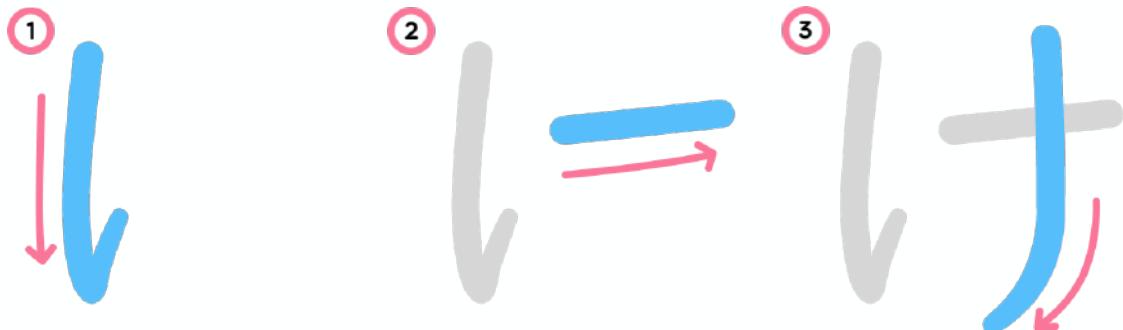
It's pronounced like ke in "kelp."
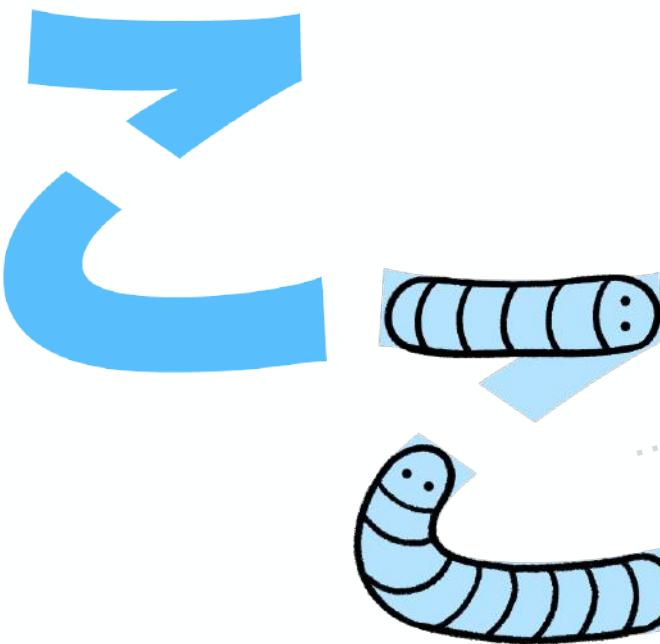
In romaji, write ke.

HOW TO REMEMBER け

See how this kana resembles some wiggly kelp?

PRACTICE WRITING け

こ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE こ

こ is just the <u>K</u> sound plus お, making a <u>ko</u> sound. It's pronounced like <u>co</u> in "<u>co</u>habitating." In British English, it is more like <u>co</u> in "<u>co</u>in."
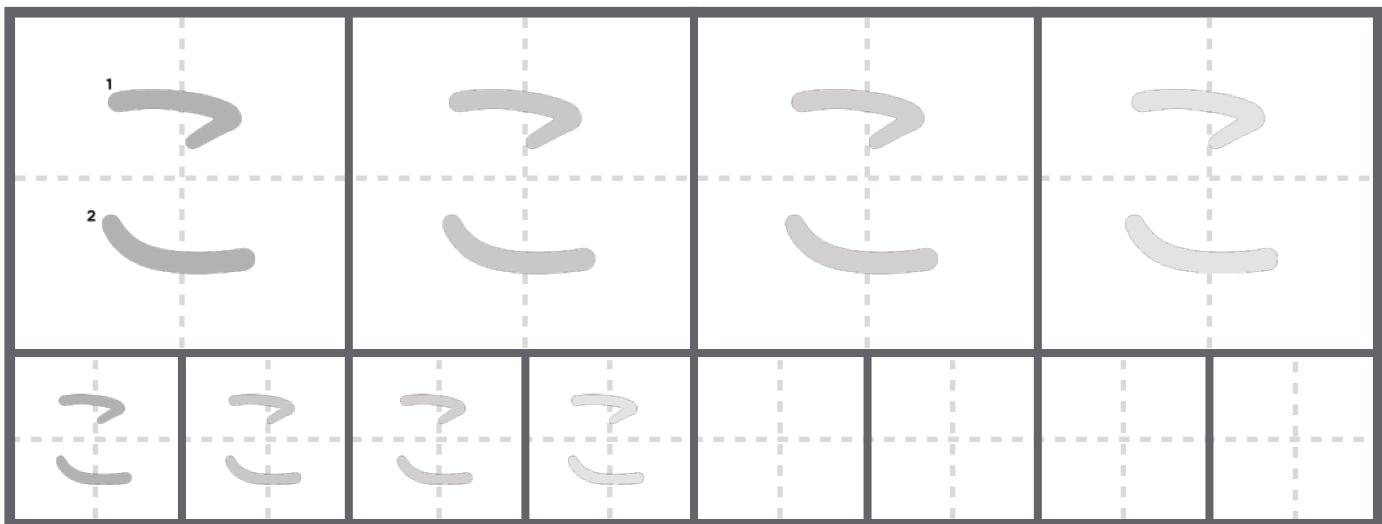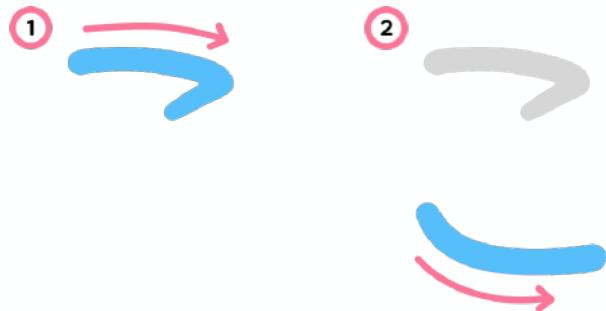
In romaji, write <u>ko</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER こ
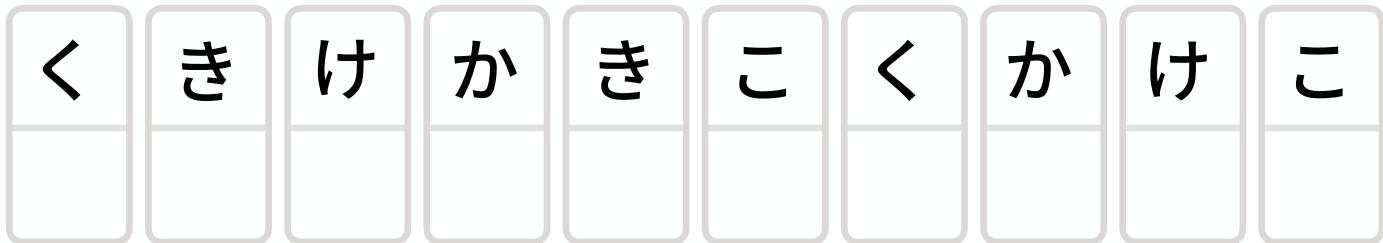
こ is a couple of <u>co</u>-habitating worms. They're so happy together, <u>co</u>-habitating the same area!

Alternatively, you could imagine a couple of short <u>co</u>rds lying on the ground next to each other.

PRACTICE WRITING こ
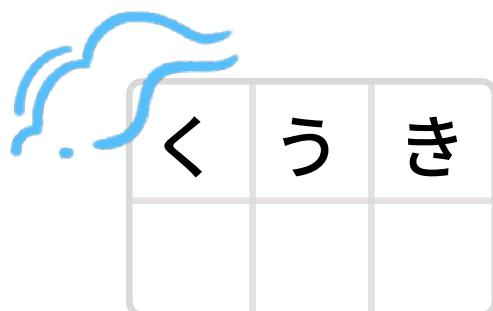
LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

く	き	け	か	き	こ	く	か	け	こ

か
か means <u>mosquito</u>.

き
き means <u>tree</u>.

く う き
くうき means <u>air</u>.

け
け means <u>hair</u>.
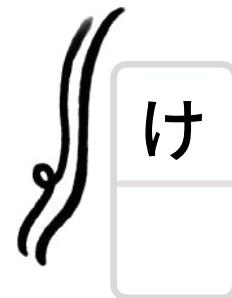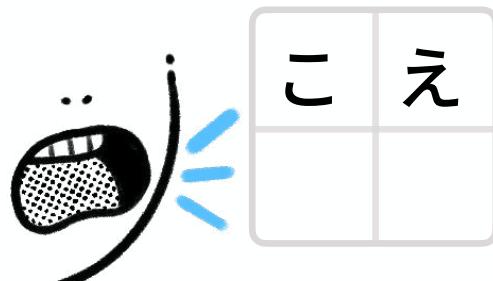
こ え
こえ means <u>voice</u>.

さ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE さ

さ is just the S sound plus あ, making a sa sound. It's pronounced like sa in "salsa."
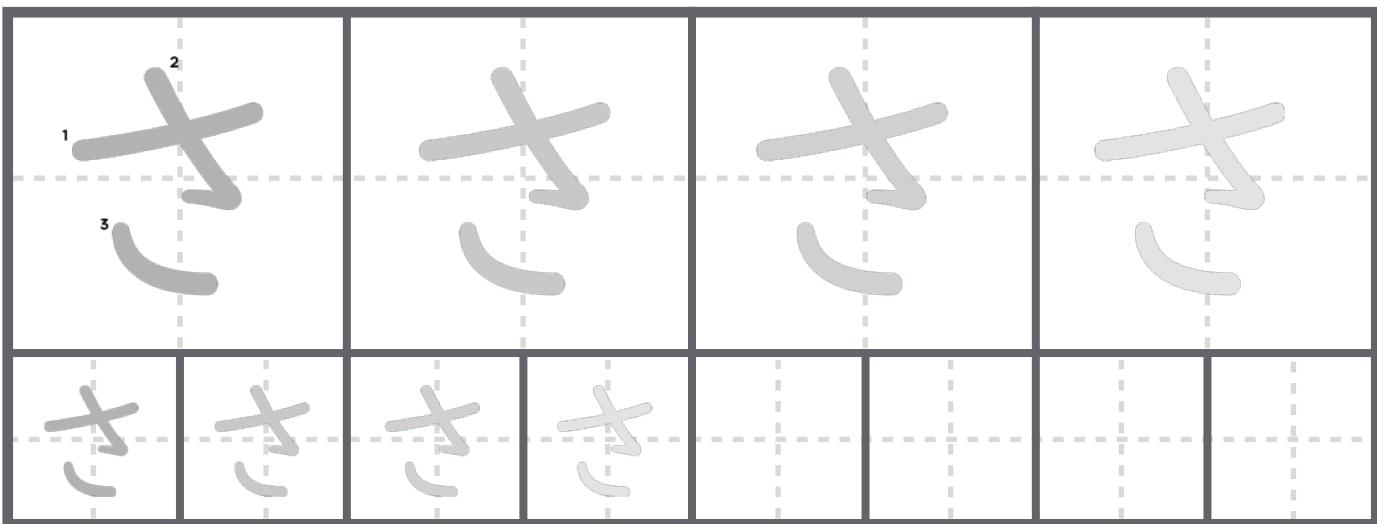
In romaji, write sa.

HOW TO REMEMBER さ

Notice how this kana looks like two hands stirring a bowl of salsa.

This salsa is so chunky and thick, you need two hands just to stir it!

PRACTICE WRITING さ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE し

し is the <u>SH</u> sound plus い, making a <u>shi</u> sound. It's pronounced like <u>shee</u> in "<u>shee</u>p."

Take note that this is the first "exception" kana that doesn't follow the patterns that show up everywhere else. Instead of being <u>si</u>, it's <u>shi</u>.
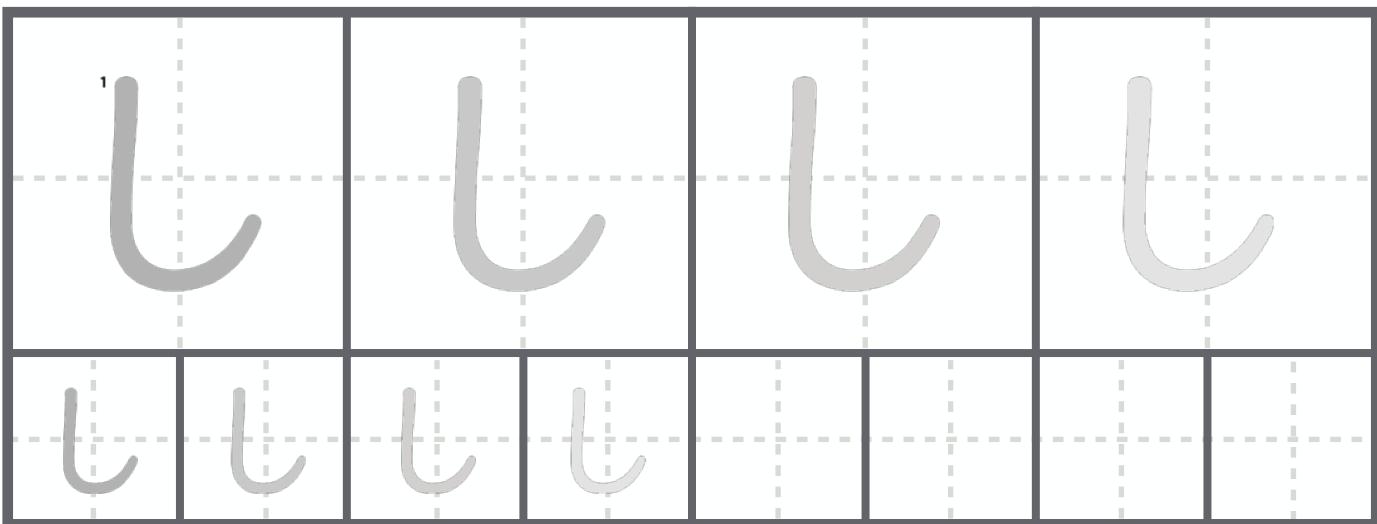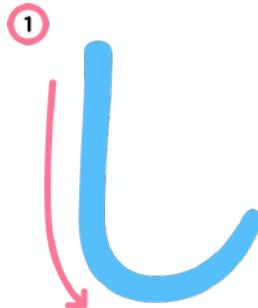
In romaji, write <u>si</u> or <u>shi</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER し
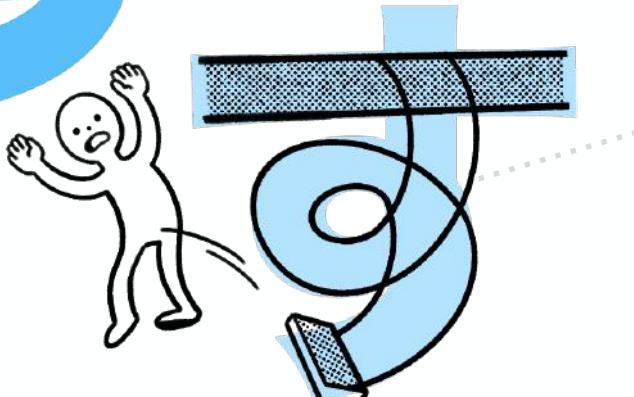
This kana looks like a giant shepherd's crook used to herd <u>shee</u>p.

Baaaa... get in that corral, <u>shee</u>p!

PRACTICE WRITING し

す

HOW TO PRONOUNCE す

す is just the S sound plus う, making a su sound. It's pronounced like the word "sue," or su in "suit."
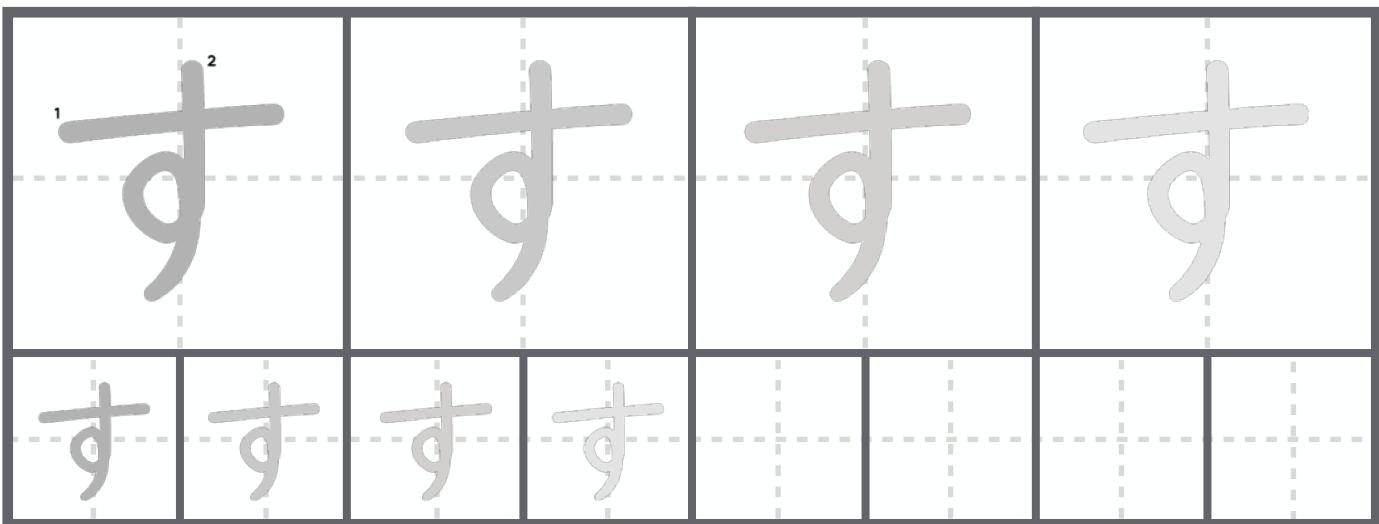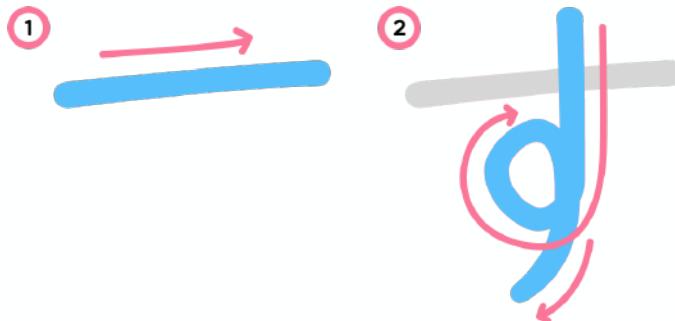
In romaji, write su.

HOW TO REMEMBER す
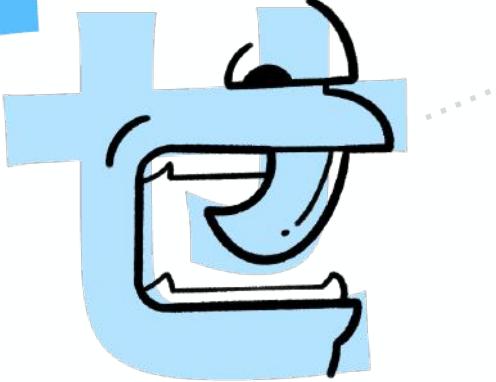
See the swing doing a loop-dee-loop and throwing that poor kid off of it?

Imagine him screaming "I'M GONNA SUE SOMEBODY FOR THIIIIIiiiissss" as he flies off into the distance.

PRACTICE WRITING す

せ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE せ

せ is just the S sound plus え, making a se sound. It's pronounced like se in "sell."
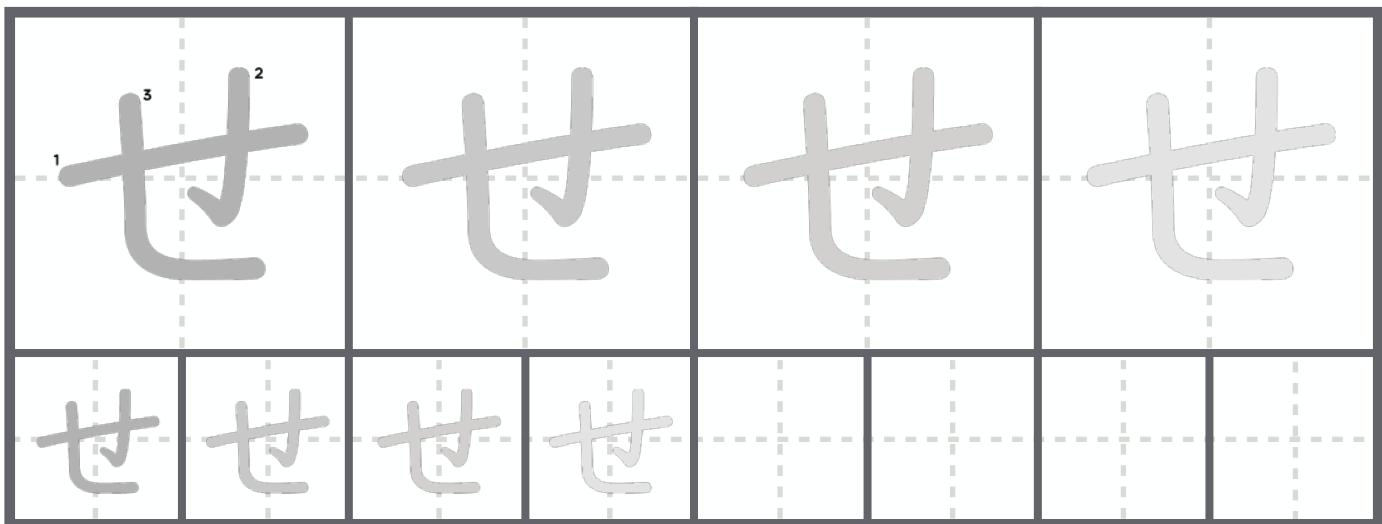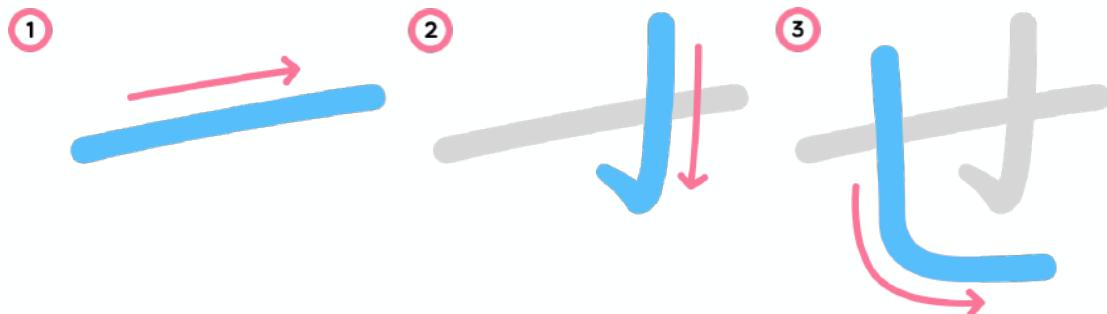
In romaji, write se.

HOW TO REMEMBER せ

This kana looks like a mouth with a big vampire fang in it. Someone's trying to sell you a set of vampire teeth because they are just so sexy!

Oh Dracula, always trying to make a quick buck.

PRACTICE WRITING せ

① ② ③

HOW TO PRONOUNCE そ

そ is just the <u>S</u> sound plus お, making a <u>so</u> sound.
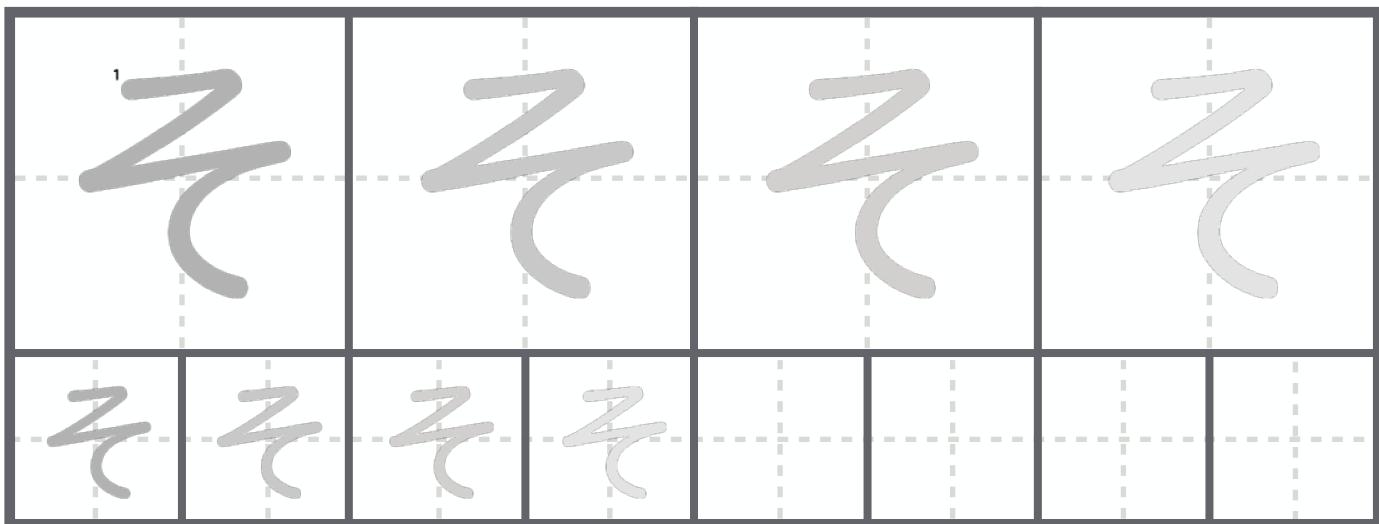
It's pronounced like <u>so</u> in "soda." In British English, it's more like <u>so</u> in "<u>so</u>ng."

In romaji, write <u>so</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER そ

See how this kana looks like a mouth slurping <u>so</u>da?

PRACTICE WRITING そ

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

し	さ	そ	せ	す	そ	し	せ	さ	す

さ	か

さか means <u>steep hill</u>.

し	お

しお means <u>salt</u>.

す

す means <u>vinegar</u>.

せ

せ means <u>height</u>.

そ	う	こ

そうこ means <u>warehouse</u>.

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

う	こ	さ	い	く	あ	せ	け	お	き

す	い	か	う	し	そ	お	あ	す	け

き	せ	し	あ	す	く	う	お	さ	い

か	け	い	そ	す	う	え	き	け	し

あ	せ	う	け	く	お	い	え	こ	せ

き	そ	い	さ	か	あ	き	う	け	お

た

た is just the T sound plus あ, making a ta sound. It's pronounced like ta in taco.
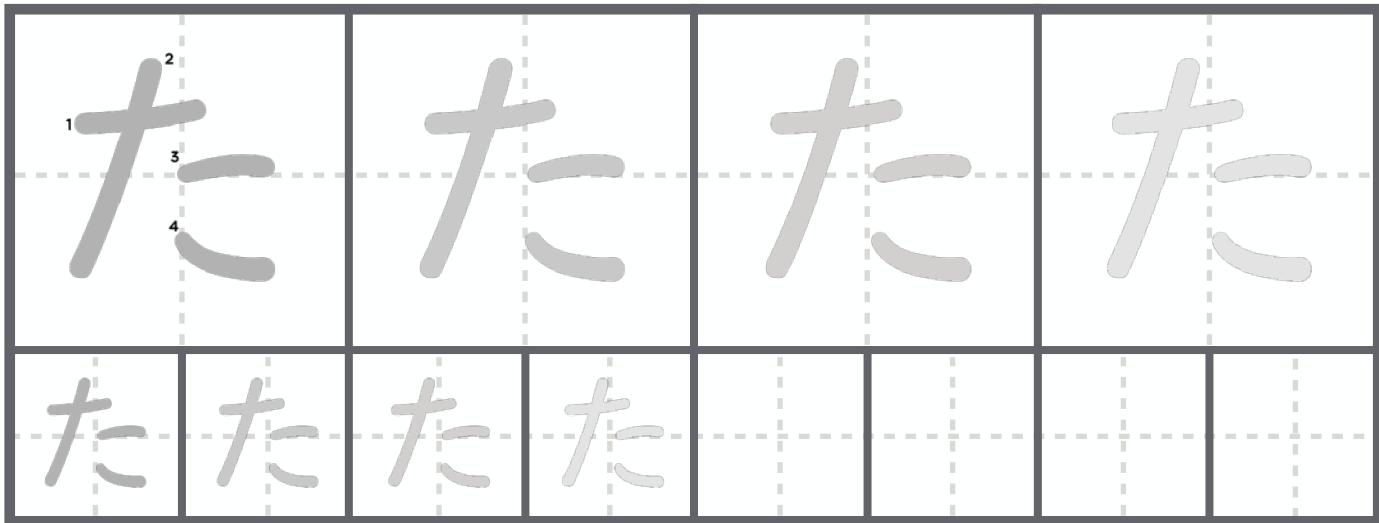
In romaji, write ta.

HOW TO REMEMBER た

Use your imagination and see this kana as a fork, taco, and lime garnish for your taco.

Wait... you're eating a taco with a fork? That's a bit weird, but you do you, pal.

PRACTICE WRITING た

① → ② → ③ → ④

ち

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ち
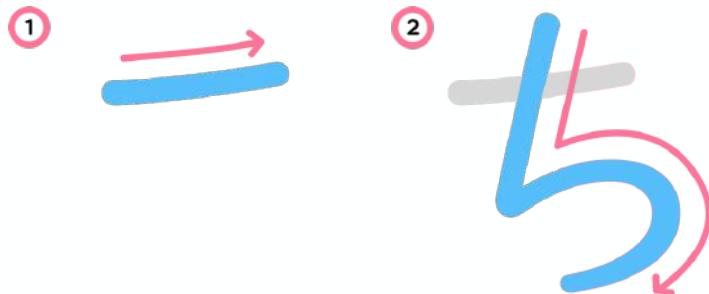
ち is pronounced like "<u>chee</u>" in "cheese." This is the second "exception" hiragana. Instead of a "ti" sound, it's a "chi" sound. Try not to forget this.

In romaji, write <u>ti</u> or <u>chi</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER ち

You know when someone tells you to say "<u>chee</u>se" when taking a picture of you? This kana looks like that forced smile you have to make every time you're in a group photo.

PRACTICE WRITING ち

HOW TO PRONOUNCE つ

つ is just the <u>TS</u> sound plus う, making a <u>tsu</u> sound. It's pronounced like <u>tsu</u> in "<u>tsu</u>nami."
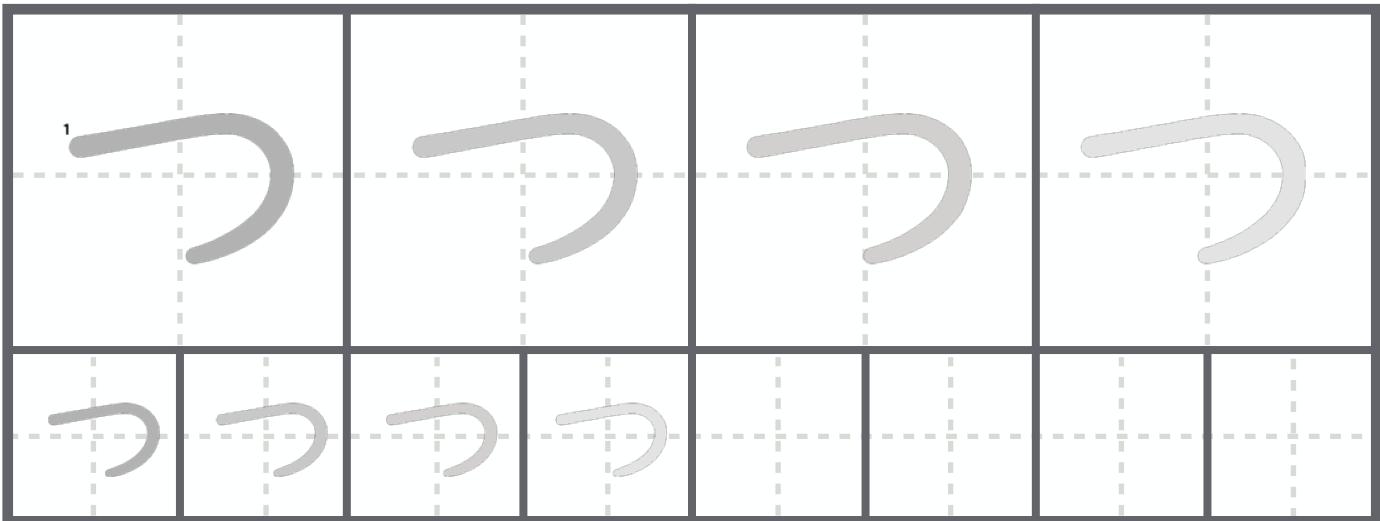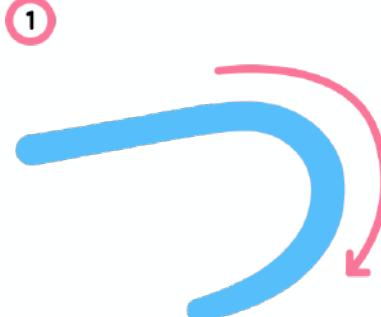
This is another "exception" hiragana. Instead of saying "tu," you say "tsu." Try not to forget this.

In romaji, write <u>tu</u> or <u>tsu</u>.
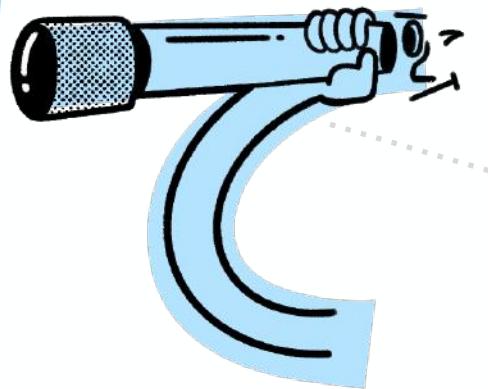
HOW TO REMEMBER つ

Look at the swoosh of this hiragana. Doesn't it look like a big wave, or <u>tsu</u>nami?

PRACTICE WRITING つ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE て

て is just the T sound plus え, making a te sound. It's pronounced like te in "telescope."
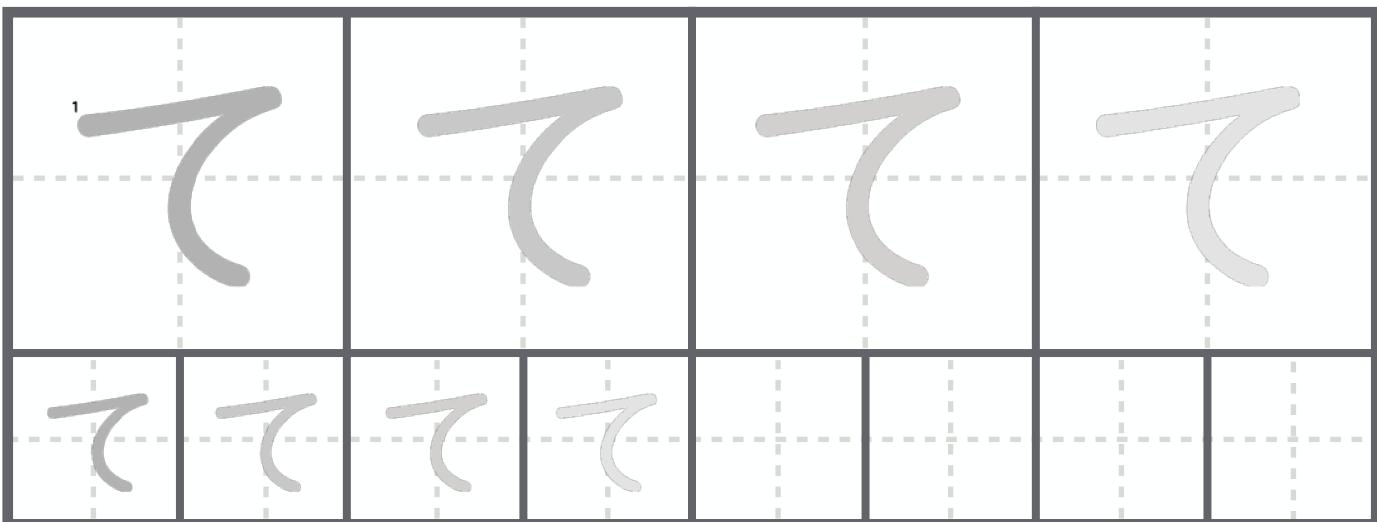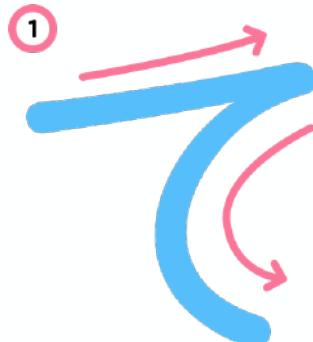
In romaji, write te.
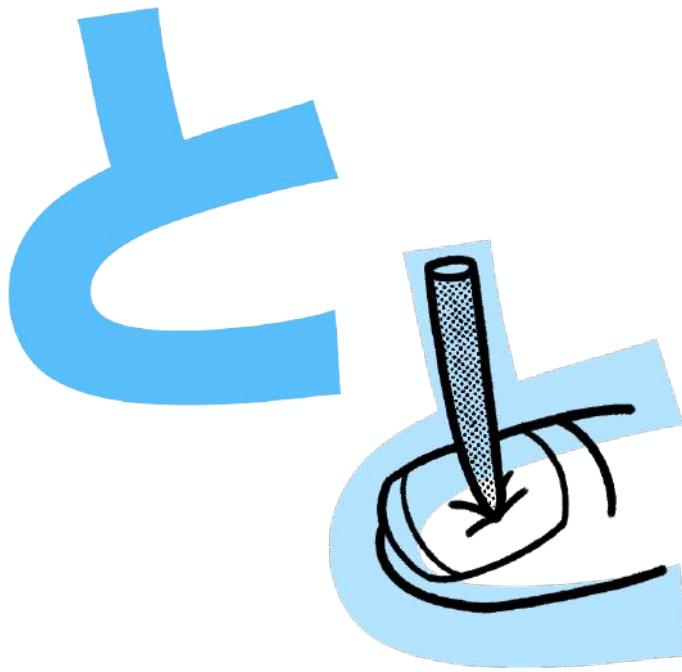
HOW TO REMEMBER て

Can you see a good ol' telescope?

It's a hand-held one! In Japanese, "hand" is て (te). That should help you remember that this kana looks like an old-school hand(te)-held telescope.

PRACTICE WRITING て

と

HOW TO PRONOUNCE と

と is just the "T" sound plus お, making a <u>to</u> sound.

It's pronounced like <u>to</u> in "<u>toe</u>." In British English, it sounds like <u>to</u> in "<u>top</u>."
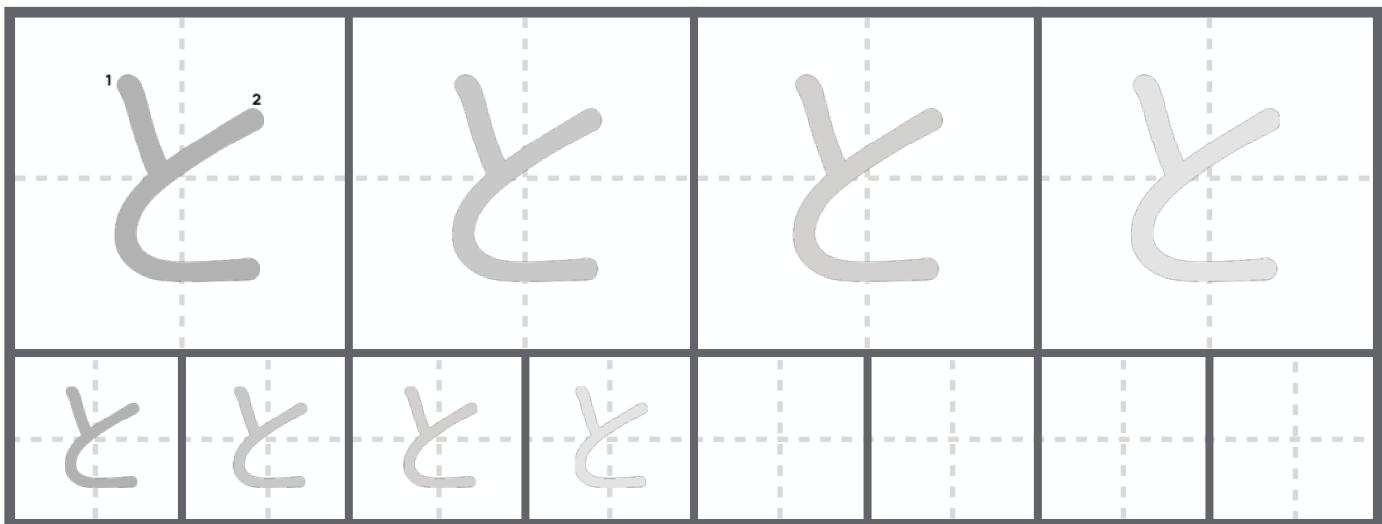
In romaji, write <u>to</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER と
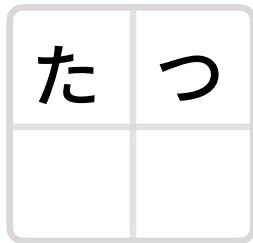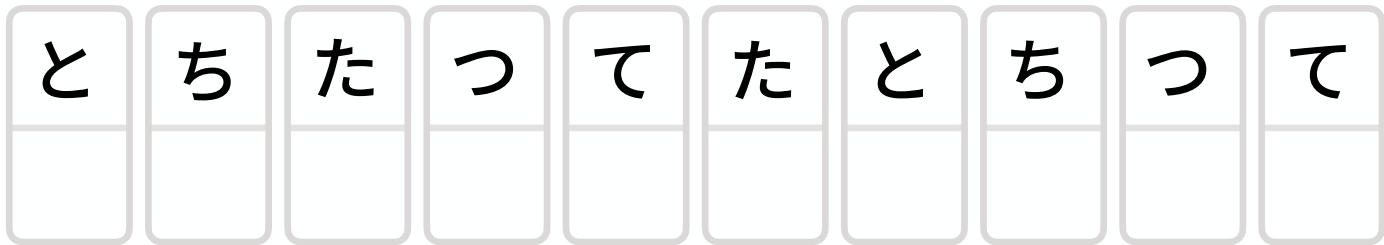
This kana looks just like someone's <u>toe</u> with a little nail or splinter in it. Imagine how much this would hurt if it was your <u>toe</u>!

PRACTICE WRITING と

① ②

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

と	ち	た	つ	て	た	と	ち	つ	て

た	つ
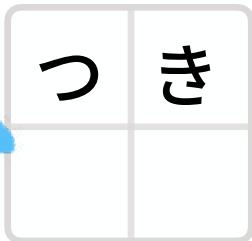
たつ means <u>to stand</u>.

ち	か

ちか means <u>underground</u>.

つ	き

つき means <u>moon</u>.

て

て means <u>hand</u>.

と

と means <u>and</u>.

な

HOW TO PRONOUNCE な

な is just the N sound plus あ, making a na sound. It's pronounced like na in "nachos."
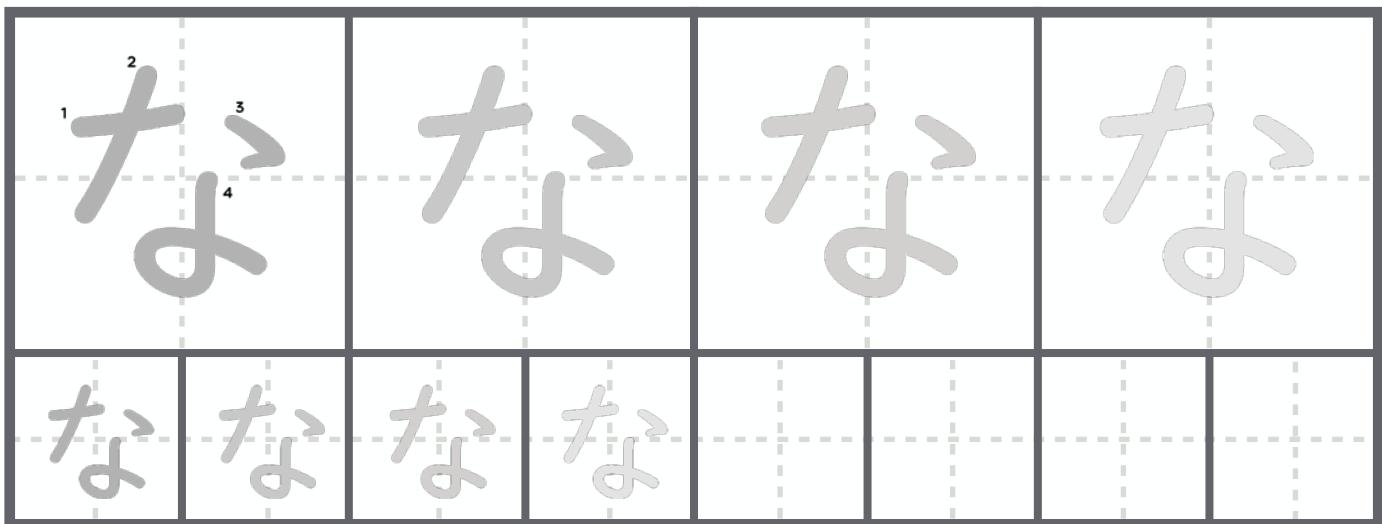
In romaji, write na.

HOW TO REMEMBER な
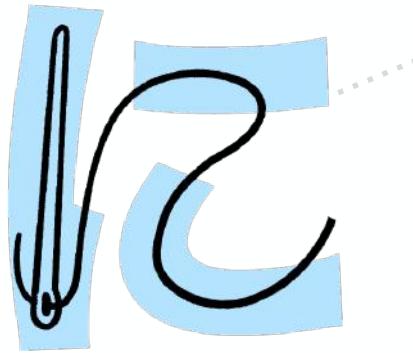
The nun is praying in front of the cross asking for nachos, because she's craving a delicious snack!

The cross up in the air should be the main giveaway that this is な.

PRACTICE WRITING な

に

HOW TO PRONOUNCE に
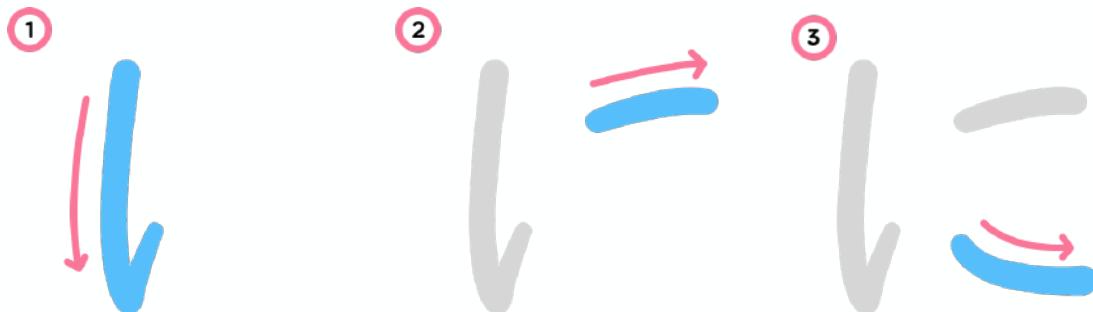
に is just the <u>N</u> sound plus い, making a <u>ni</u> sound. It's pronounced like <u>nee</u> in "<u>nee</u>dle."

In romaji, write <u>ni</u>.
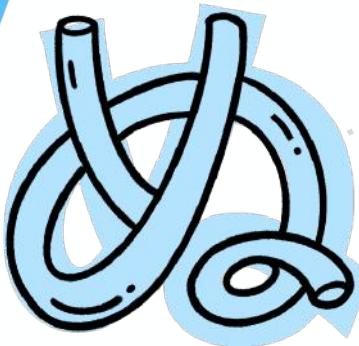
HOW TO REMEMBER に

Do you see the <u>nee</u>dle pulling the thread?

PRACTICE WRITING に

ぬ
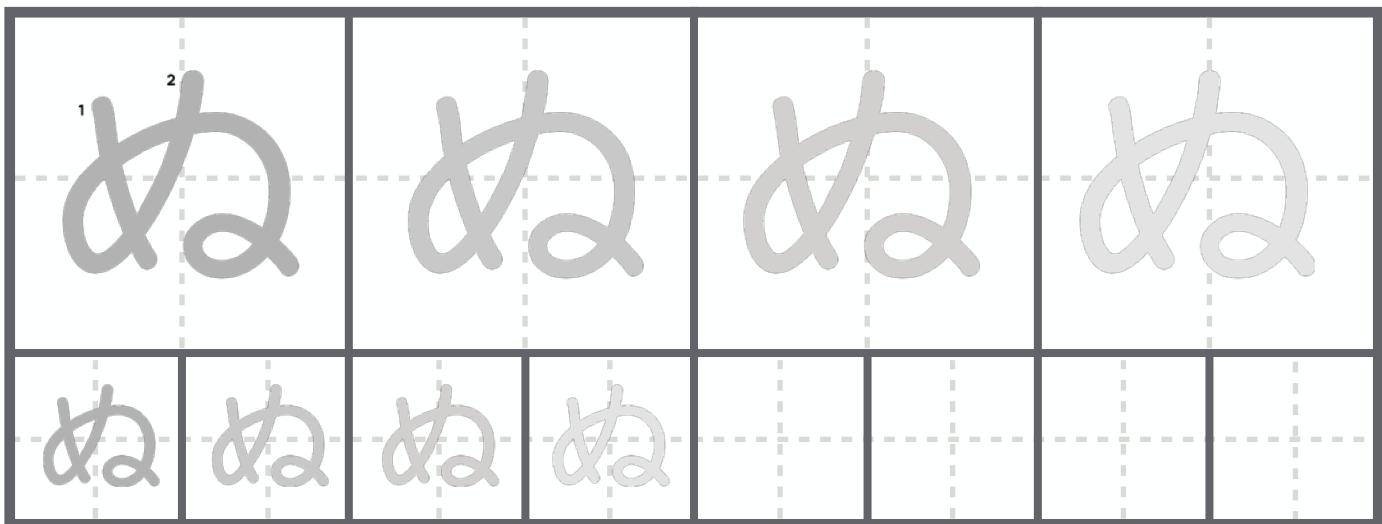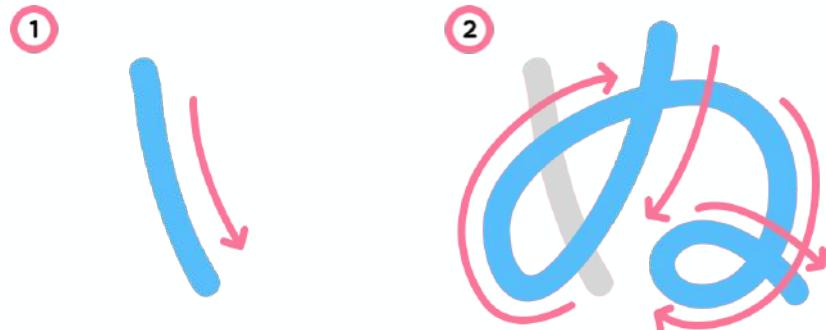
ぬ is just the N sound plus う, making a nu sound. It's pronounced like noo in "noodle."

In romaji, write nu.

HOW TO REMEMBER ぬ

This kana looks like some noodles. There are several other kana that are similar to this one (れ, め, ね, わ), but you know this one is noodles because there are no sharp angles in it. It's 100% smooth and bendable, like noodles! It even has an extra loop at the bottom, because it is a noodle.

PRACTICE WRITING ぬ

1
2

ぬ ぬ ぬ ぬ

ぬ ぬ ぬ ぬ
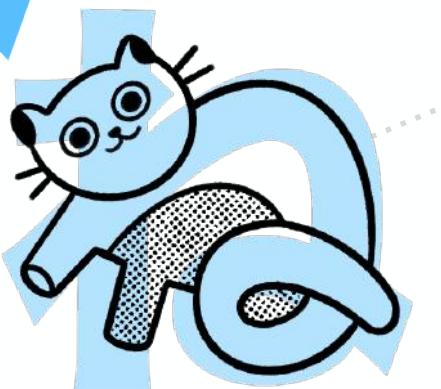
ね

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ね

ね is just the N sound plus え, making a ne sound. It's pronounced like ne in "Nelly."

In romaji, write ne.

HOW TO REMEMBER ね
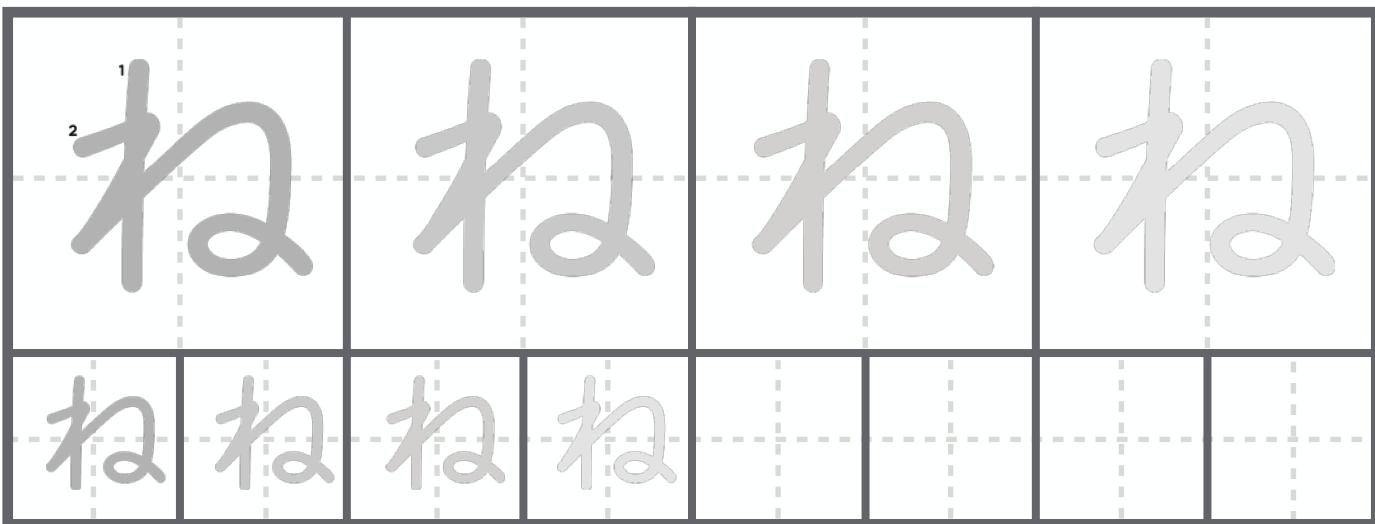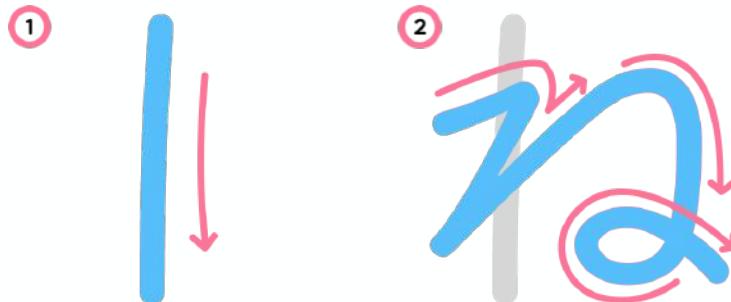
This is Nelly the cat. There are other kana very similar to this one (ぬ, れ, め, わ), but you know this is different. Why? Because it has a loop at the end for the tail, and it's not super bendable like ぬ (noodles) is — see those sharp corners on the left?
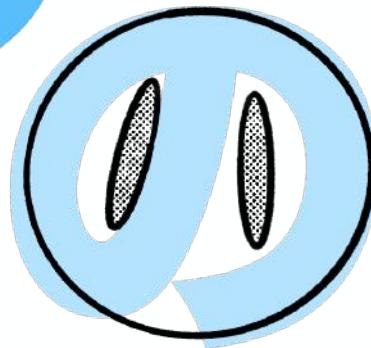
To top things off, Nelly is a necromancer. Why? I have no idea, you'll have to ask her. It must have something to do with the undead cat army she's creating.

Also, if you know the word "neko" (Japanese for "cat"), you can use that too. This is a ねこ.

PRACTICE WRITING ね

HOW TO PRONOUNCE の
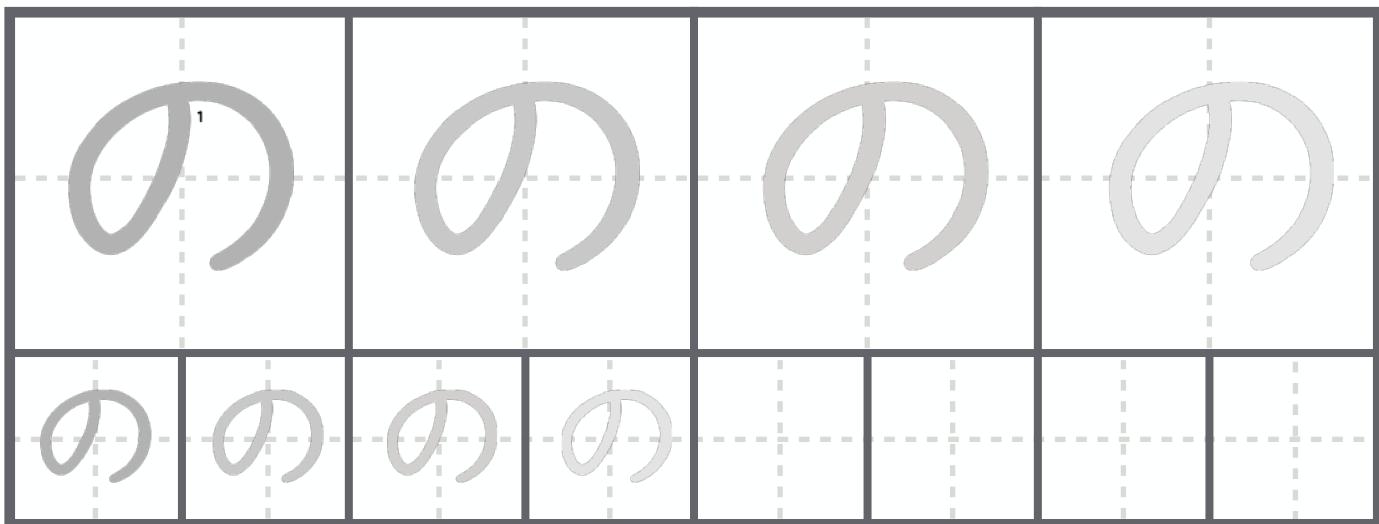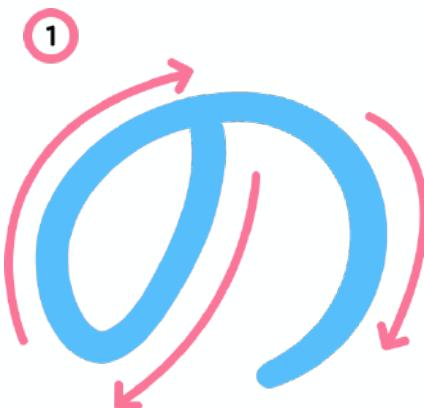
の is just the <u>N</u> sound plus お, making a <u>no</u> sound. It's pronounced like <u>no</u> in "<u>no</u>se" or "<u>no</u>ri."

In romaji, write <u>no</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER の
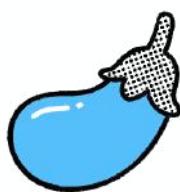
See the big pig <u>no</u>se there? You can also think of this as a "<u>No</u> smoking" sign (the one with the cigarette and big red circle/slash through it). Pick the one that sticks with you the best.

PRACTICE WRITING の ①

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

な	の	に	ぬ	ね	の	に	ぬ	な	ね
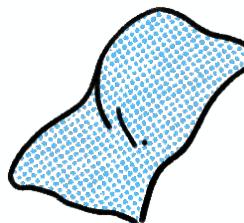
なす means <u>eggplant</u>.
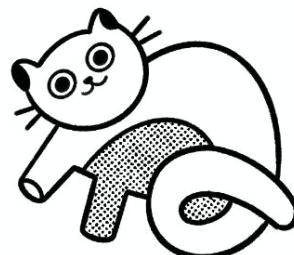
にく means <u>meat</u>.

ぬの means <u>fabric</u>.
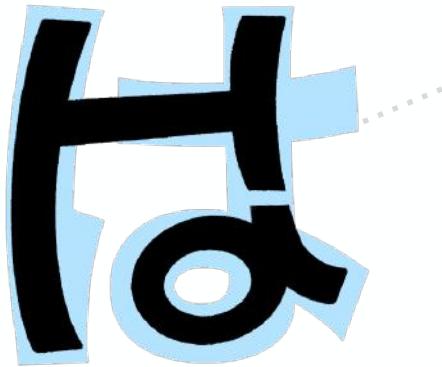
ねこ means <u>cat</u>.

のう means <u>brain</u>.

は

HOW TO PRONOUNCE は

は is just the H sound plus あ, making a ha sound. It's pronounced like ha in "haha" (like laughing!).

In romaji, write ha.
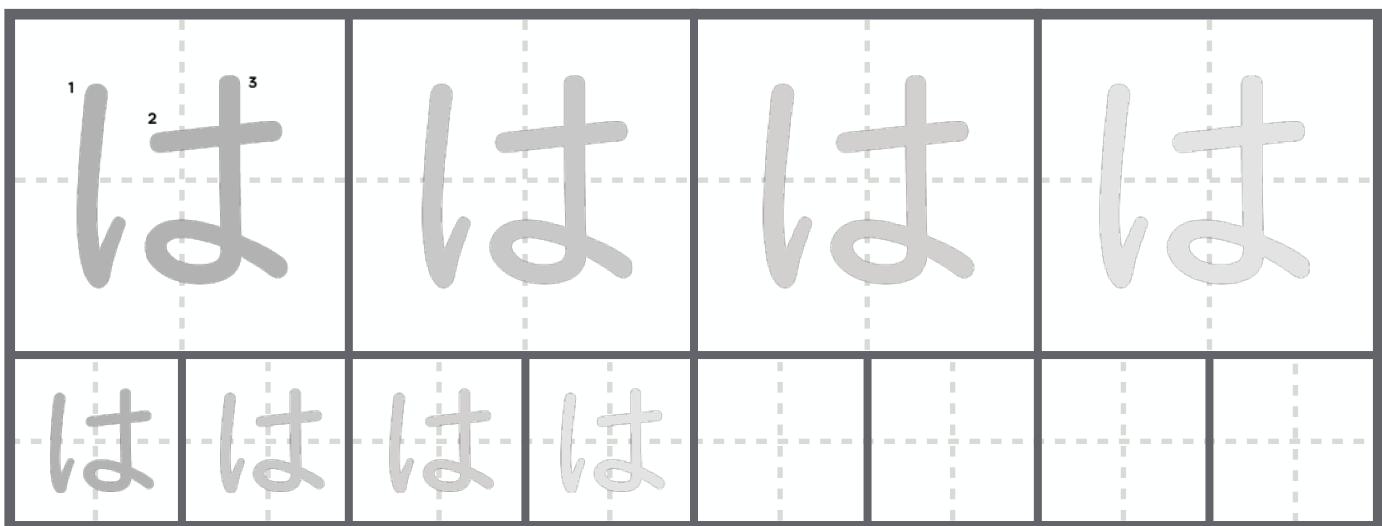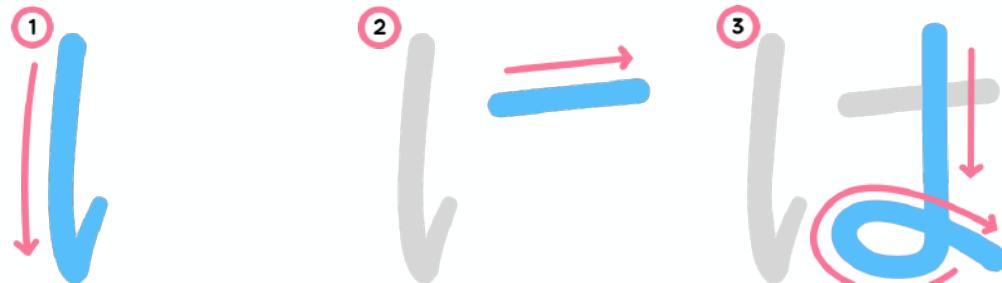
HOW TO REMEMBER は
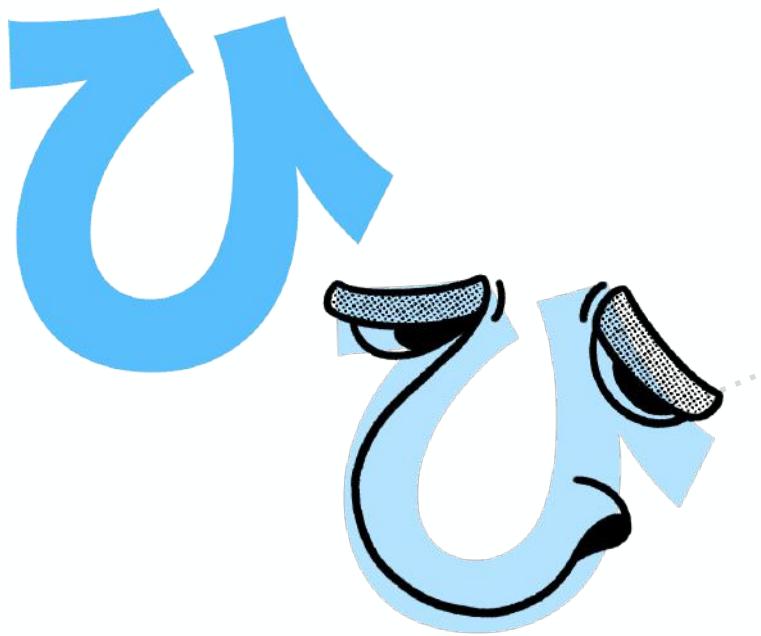
This kana looks like an uppercase letter H plus a lowercase letter a.

What does that spell? "Ha!"

Why are you laughing? Stop that. Make sure you can see the H+a in the kana.

PRACTICE WRITING は

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ひ

ひ is just the H sound plus い, making a hi sound.

It's like the English pronoun "he." In other words, it sounds like "he" in "heat."
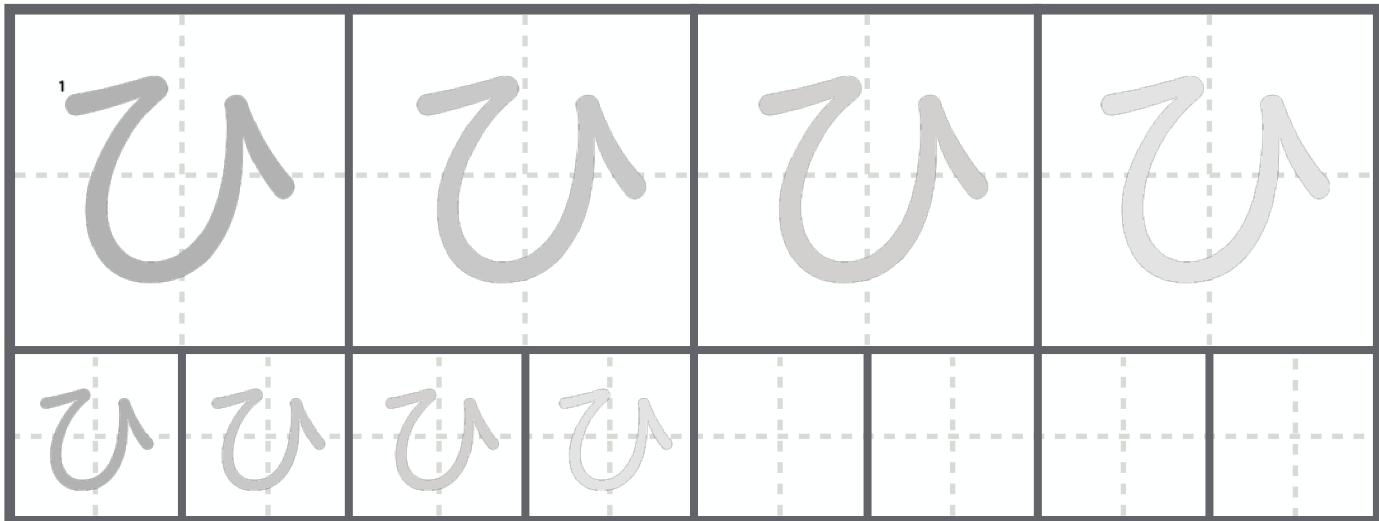
In romaji, write hi.

HOW TO REMEMBER ひ

He has a big nose. See that big nose? Now say it out loud. "He has a big nose."

PRACTICE WRITING ひ ①

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ふ

ふ is halfway between the F and H sounds, plus う, making a fu / hu sound.
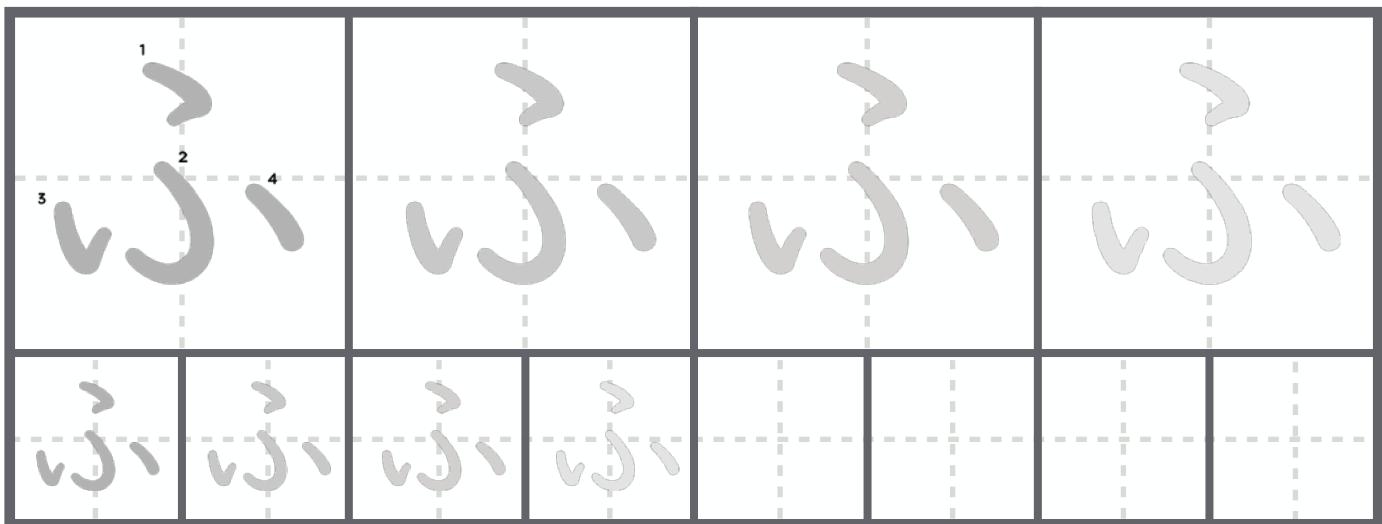
It's pronounced like a softly blown-out version of foo in "fool," or sometimes hoo in "hoop."
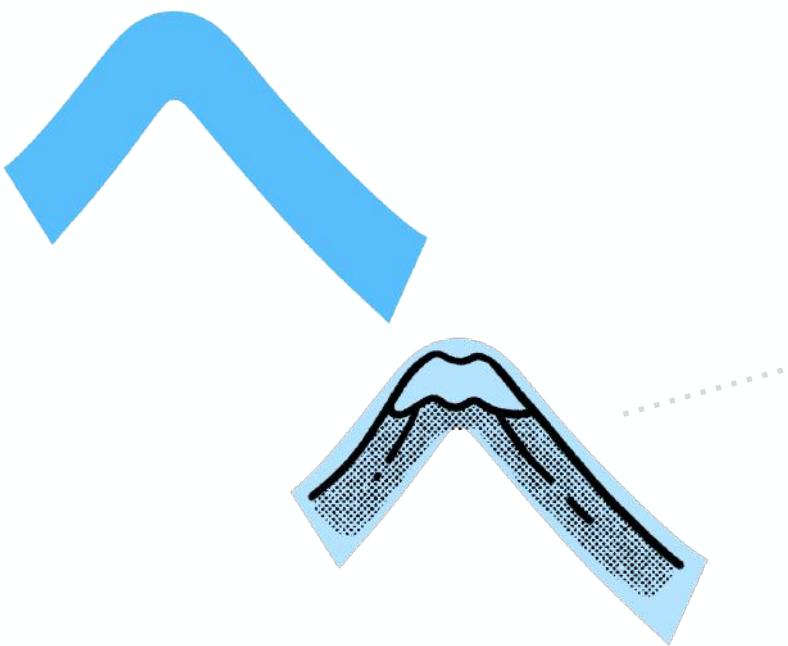
In romaji, write either fu or hu.

HOW TO REMEMBER ふ

Someone is over there dancing like a fool. What's that around their neck? ...Oh, that's a hula hoop! That's why they're twisting their body so hard.

PRACTICE WRITING ふ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE へ

へ is just the <u>H</u> sound plus え, making a <u>he</u> sound. It's pronounced like <u>he</u> in "<u>help</u>," or "<u>He</u>lens."
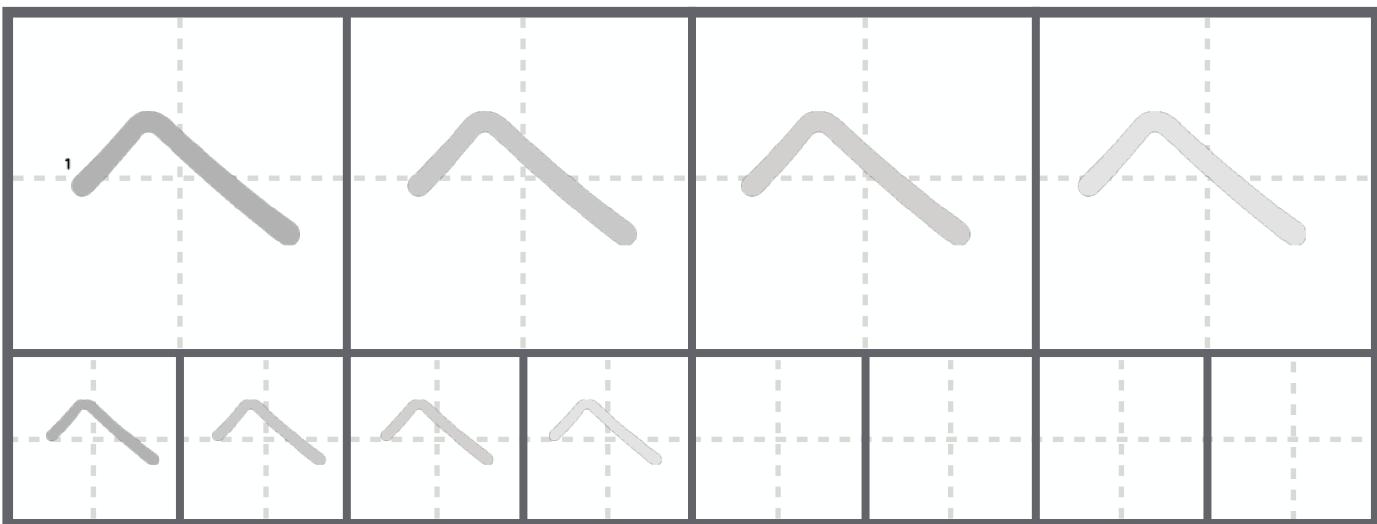
In romaji, write <u>he</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER へ
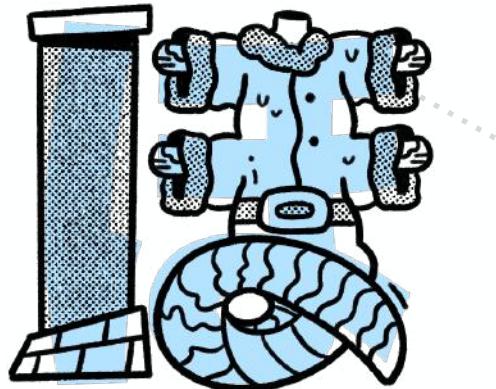
Do you know the famous mountain Mt. Saint <u>He</u>lens? This kana isn't totally flat like <u>He</u>lens is, but it's pretty squat-looking.

That's why this one is Helens. If it ever erupts again, people will need <u>help</u>!

PRACTICE WRITING へ

ほ
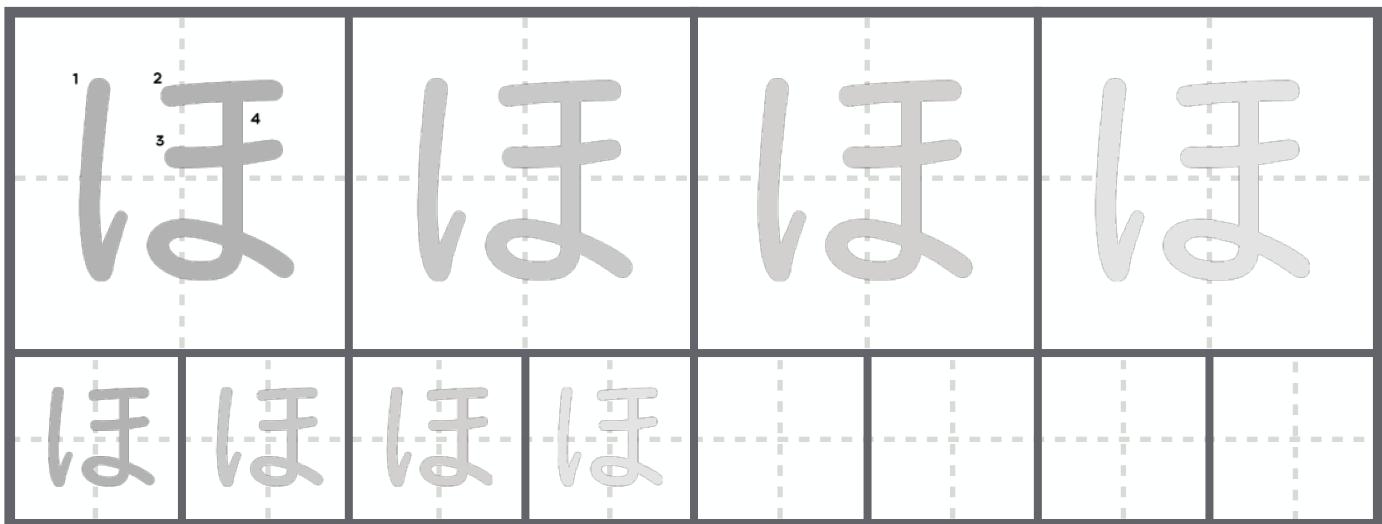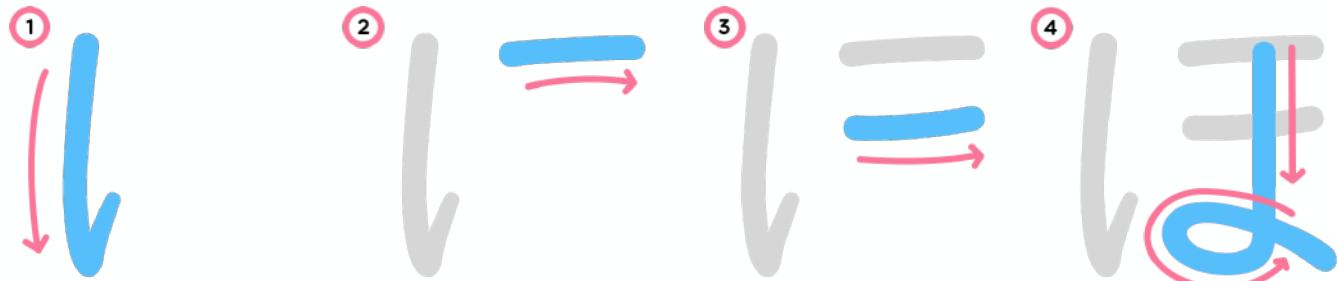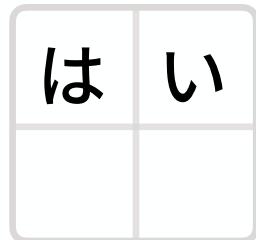
PRACTICE WRITING ほ

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

へ	ふ	は	ひ	ほ	ふ	は	ひ	へ	ほ

は	い

はい means <u>yes</u>.

ひ	と

ひと means <u>person</u>.

ふ	く
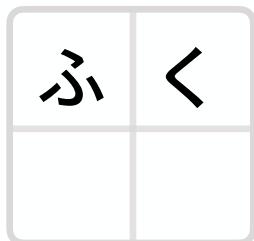
ふく means <u>clothes</u>.

へ	そ

へそ means <u>belly button</u>.

ほ	の	お

ほのお means <u>fire</u>.

LET'S PRACTICE READING HIRAGANA FROM T – N – H ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

の	は	と	に	ほ	た	て	ね	の	な

ひ	な	ほ	ち	て	に	ふ	た	ぬ	て
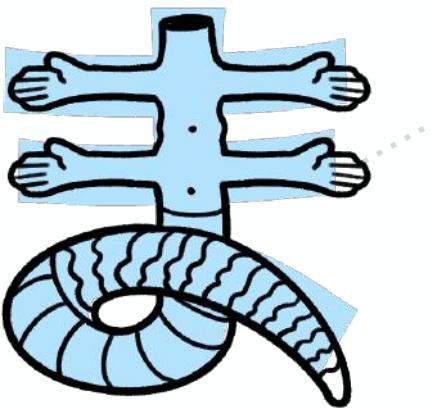
と	つ	に	へ	ね	つ	の	な	は	た

の	な	ね	は	に	と	ぬ	ほ	ひ	へ

ち	ぬ	ふ	な	ほ	た	に	ね	と	な

ひ	ふ	は	ね	ち	つ	ほ	へ	ぬ	の

ま

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ま
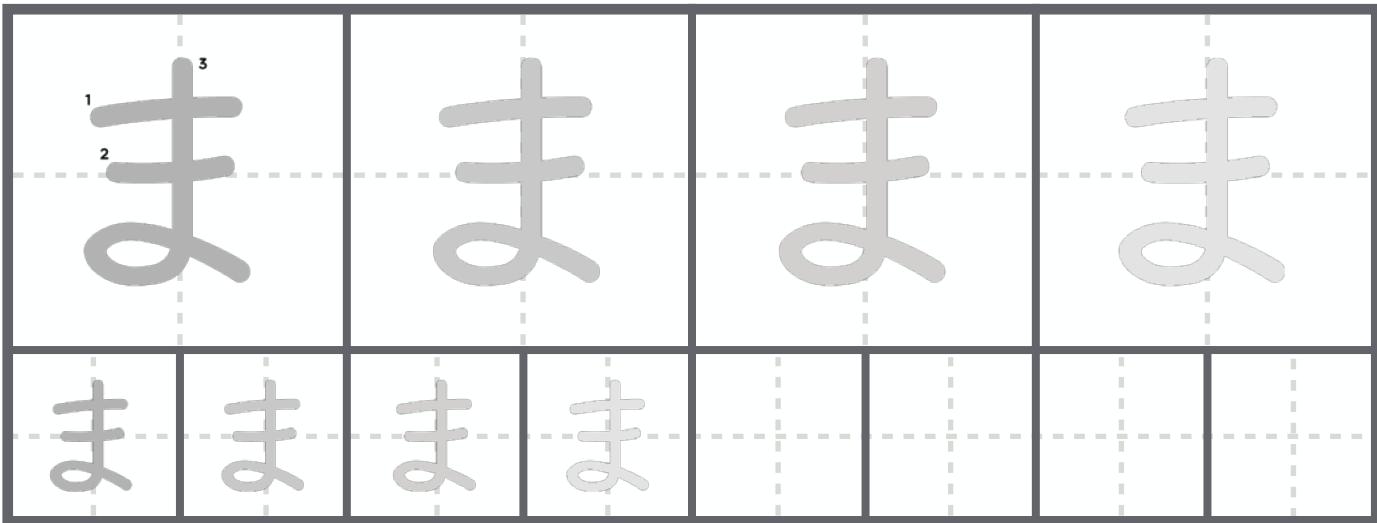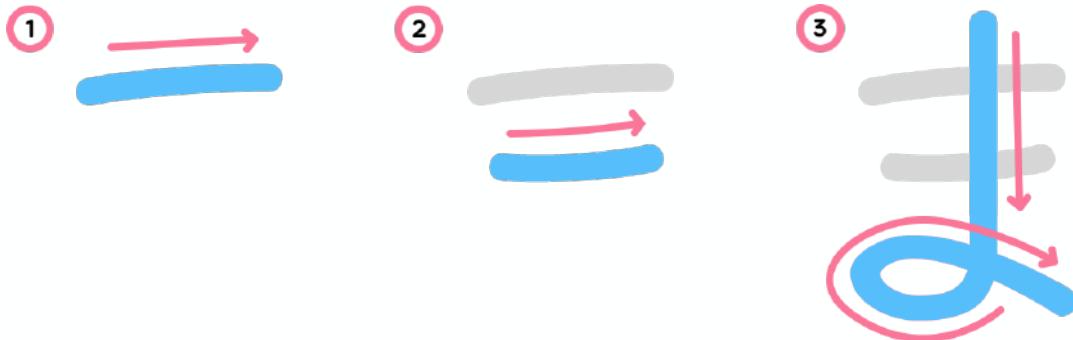
ま is just the "M" sound plus あ, making a <u>ma</u> sound. It's pronounced like the English word "<u>ma</u>" (meaning "mother"). In other words, it sounds like <u>ma</u> in "<u>ma</u>rk."

In romaji, write <u>ma</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER ま

Removing your head? Doubling your hands and arms? What sort of evil <u>ma</u>gic is this? What makes it weirder is that your <u>ma</u>ma is the one doing this magic. Imagine your <u>ma</u> looking like this. Aghh!

PRACTICE WRITING ま

1 2 3

み

HOW TO PRONOUNCE み

み is just the M sound plus い, making a mi sound.

It's pronounced like the English word "me." In other words, it sounds like mee in "meet."
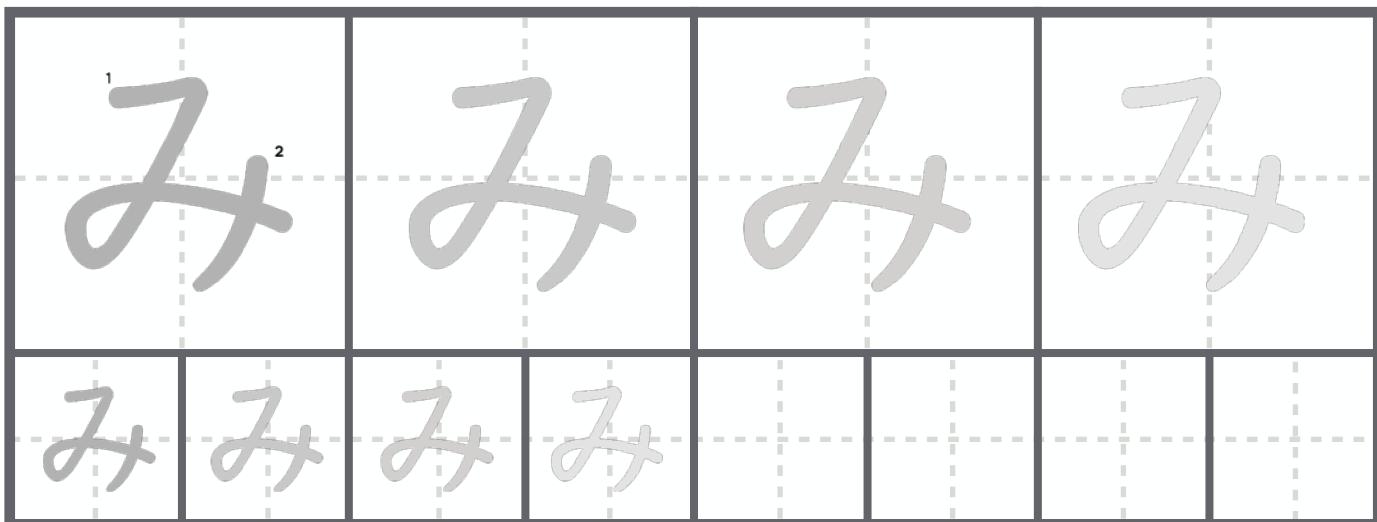
In romaji, write mi.

HOW TO REMEMBER み
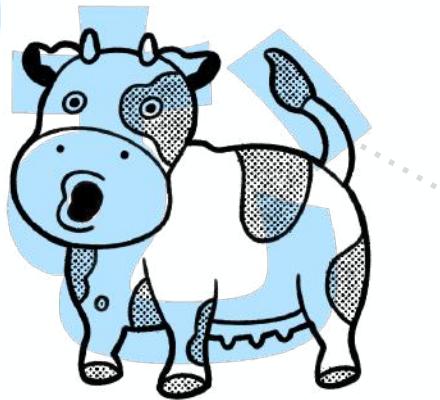
Looks like lucky number 21. Who just hit the blackjack? Me! Who just turned 21 as well? Me!!

Listen to me sing my own birthday song... mi mi Mi MIIIIIII!

PRACTICE WRITING み

む

HOW TO PRONOUNCE む

む is just the M sound plus う, making a mu sound.

It's pronounced like what cows say in English: "moo." In other words, it sounds like moo in "mood."
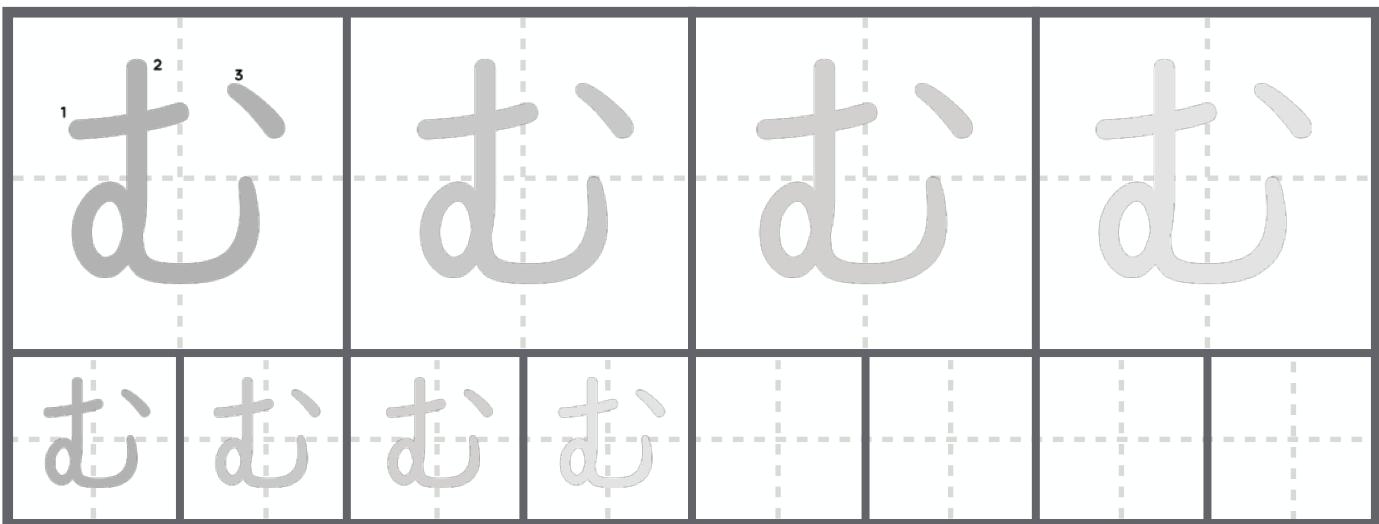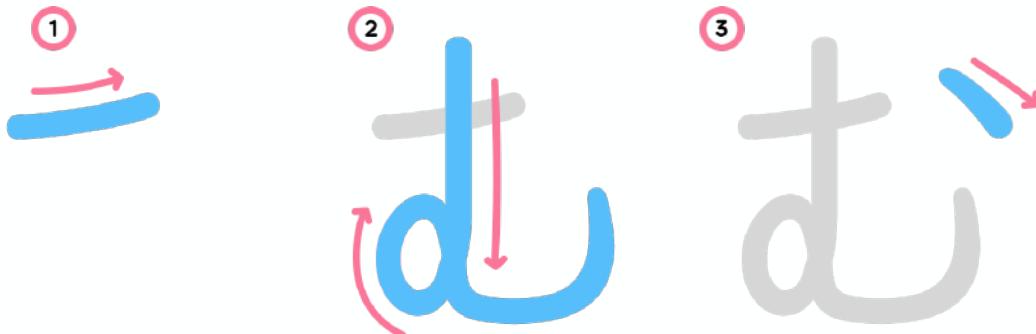
In romaji, write mu.

HOW TO REMEMBER む
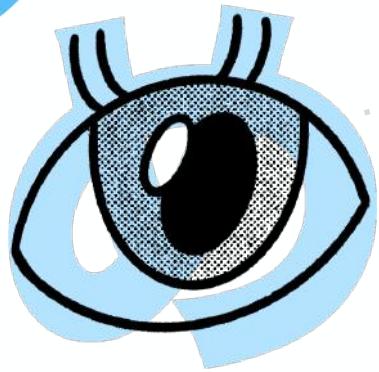
"Moooooo," says the cow.

"MOOOOOOO."

PRACTICE WRITING む

め

HOW TO PRONOUNCE め

め is just the <u>M</u> sound plus え, making a <u>me</u> sound.

It's pronounced like <u>me</u> in "<u>me</u>ss."
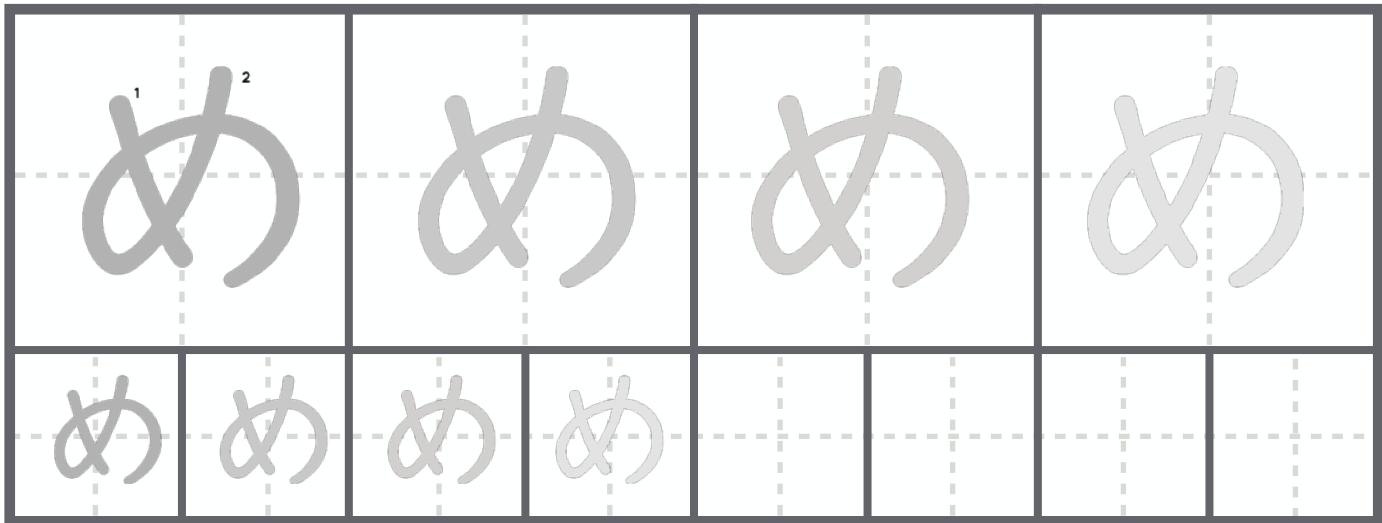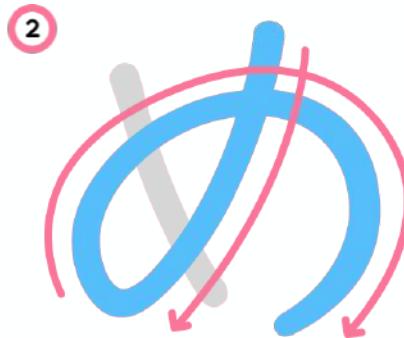
In romaji, write <u>me</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER め
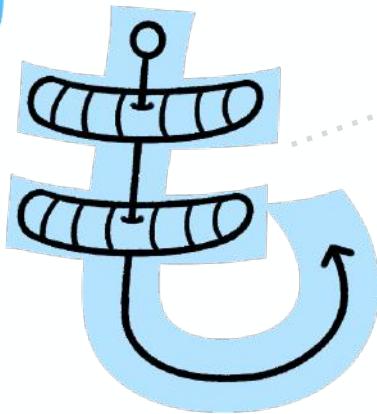
Look at that beautiful eye! It's so beautiful because of the <u>ma</u>keup on it. Gotta look pretty in the eyes, or else your ensemble will just be "<u>meh</u>."

If you also happen to know the word for "eye" in Japanese, that will help too. The word for "eye" in Japanese is just め (<u>me</u>).

PRACTICE WRITING め

も

も is just the M sound plus お, making a mo sound.
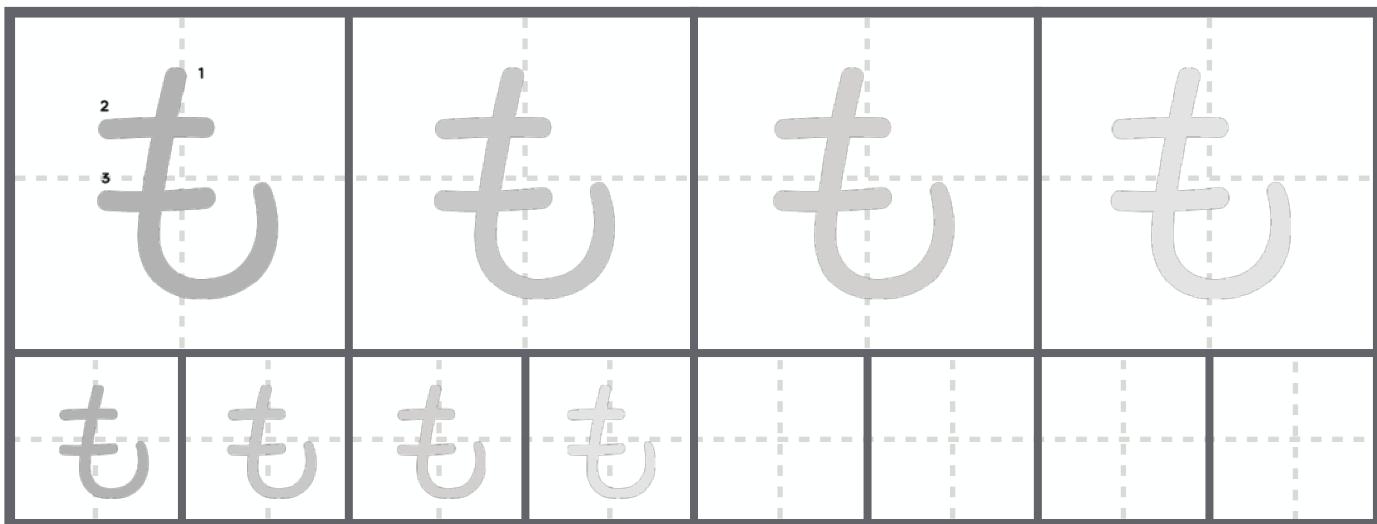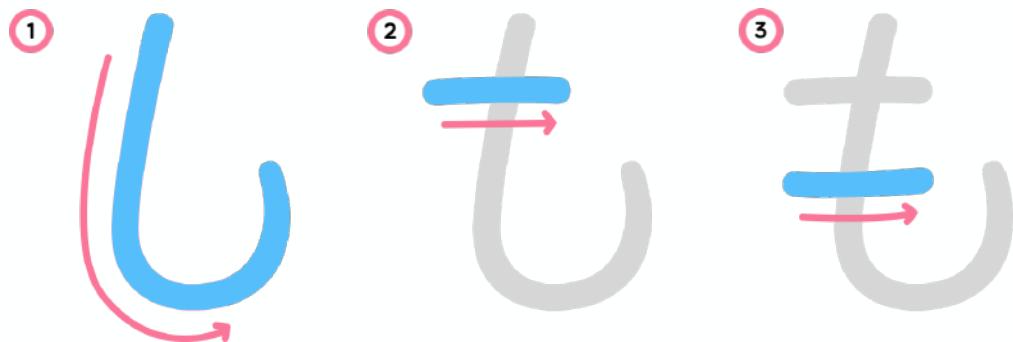
It's pronounced like mo in "more."

In romaji, write mo.

HOW TO REMEMBER も

You want to catch more fish, so you add more worms to your hook.

PRACTICE WRITING も

① ② ③

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

む	め	も	ま	み	も	ま	み	む	め

ま	え

まえ means <u>forward</u>.

み	み

みみ means <u>ear</u>.
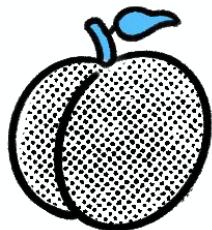
む	し

むし means <u>bug</u>.

め
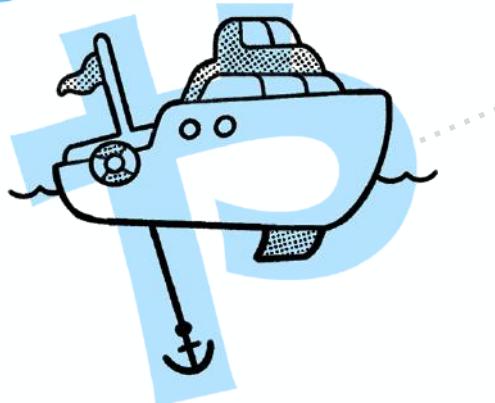
め means <u>eye</u>.

も	も

もも means <u>peach</u>.

HOW TO PRONOUNCE や

や is just the Y sound plus あ, making a ya sound. It's pronounced like ya in "yacht." In British English, it sounds more like ya in "yak."

In romaji, write ya.
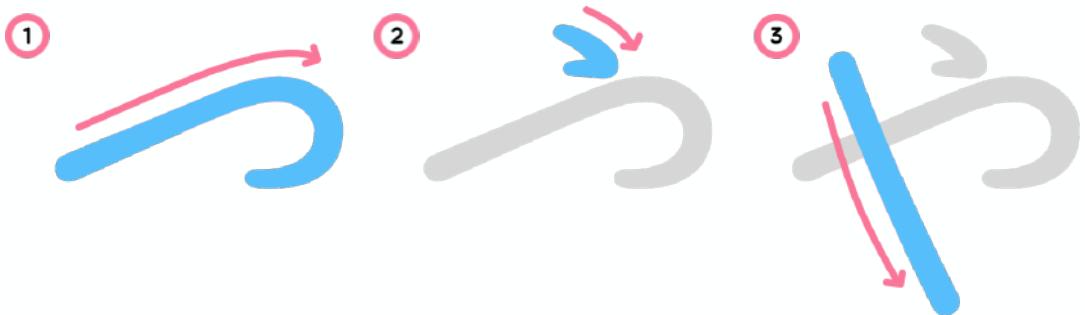
HOW TO REMEMBER や

See how this kana looks like a yacht with an anchor going down? It's even got a little flag on the rear... how cute.
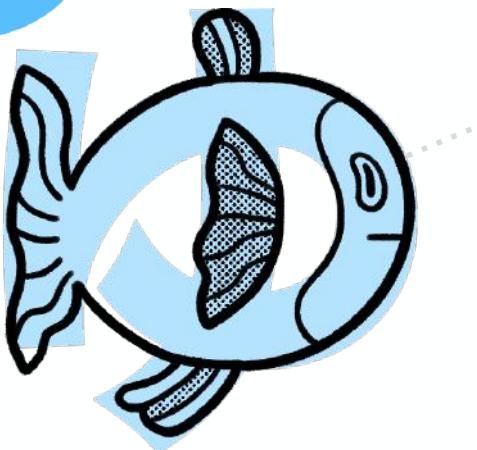
Alternatively, you can think of this as the face of a yak too!

PRACTICE WRITING や

ゆ
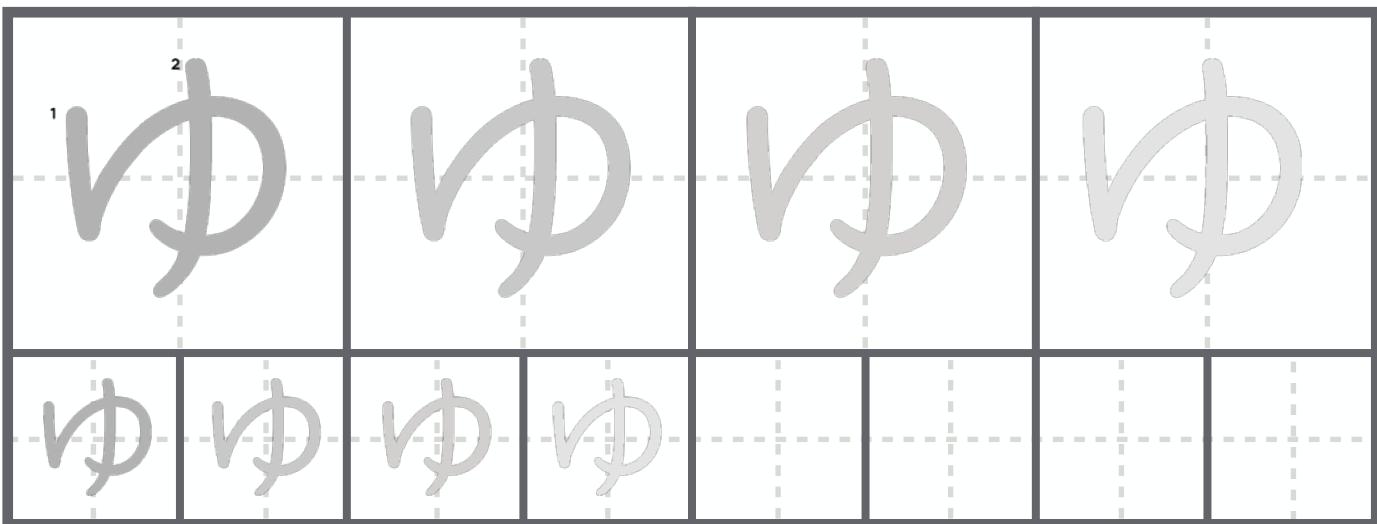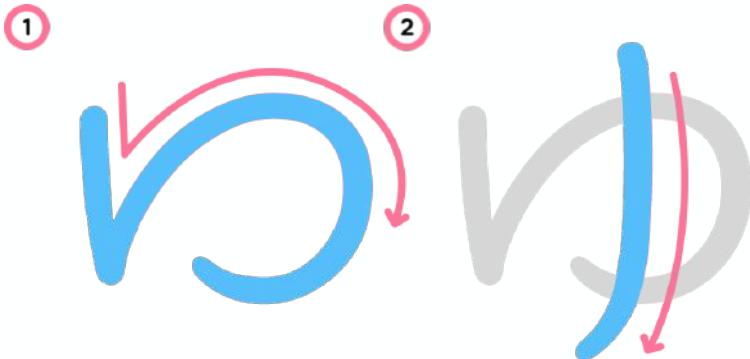
HOW TO PRONOUNCE ゆ

ゆ is just the Y sound plus う, making a yu sound. It's pronounced like the English word "you."
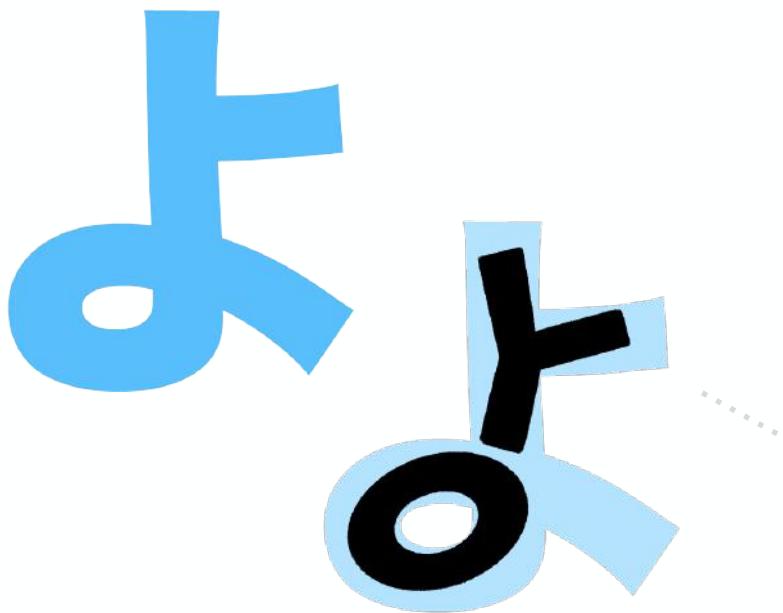
In romaji, write yu.

HOW TO REMEMBER ゆ

This kana is a very unique looking fish! It looks like a big eyeball swimming in the water. What's it looking at? You, you big goofball! Isn't it weird how fish always look like they're staring at you?

PRACTICE WRITING ゆ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE よ

よ is just the Y sound plus お, making a yo sound.
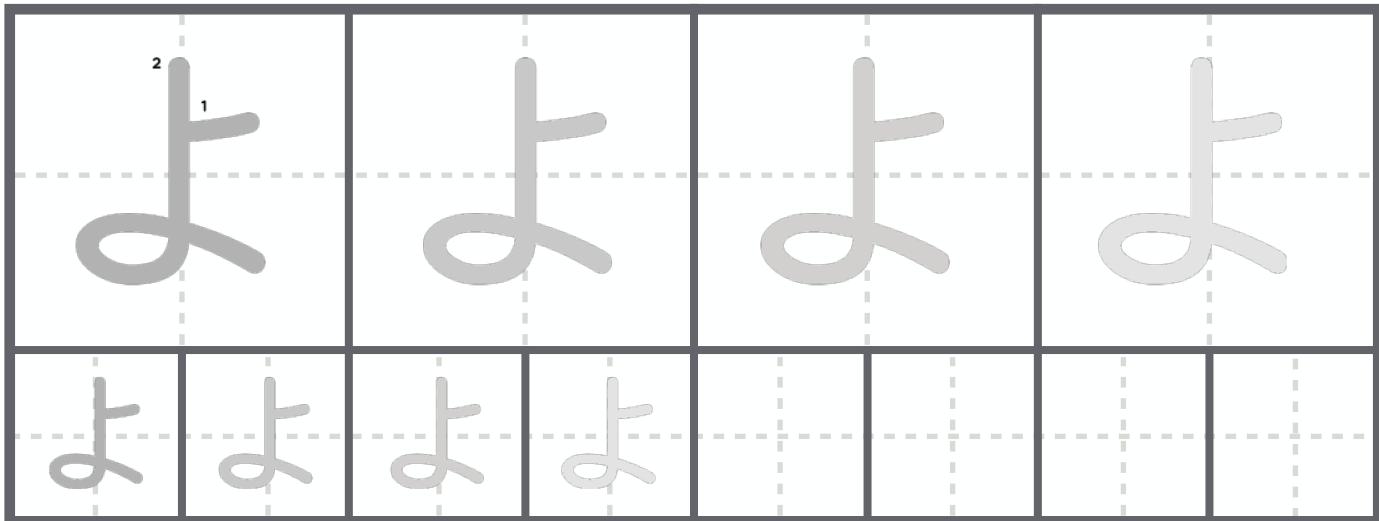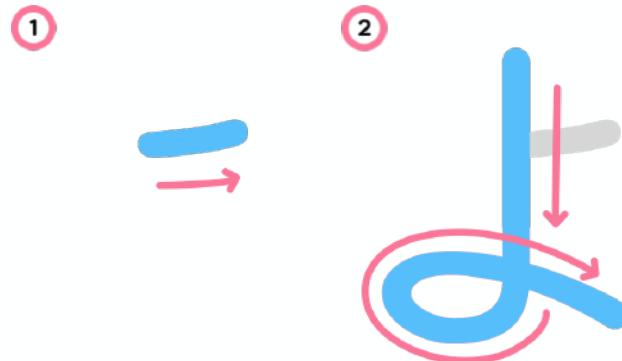
It's pronounced like yo in "yo-yo." In British English, it's more like yo in "yonder."

In romaji, write yo.

HOW TO REMEMBER よ

Yo, this kana looks like the letters Y & O! And look, you can even play yo-yo with it. Look at it slide down and back up again... it's mesmerizing, yo.

PRACTICE WRITING よ

ONLY THREE KANA IN THE Y-COLUMN?

It was a lot quicker going through the Y-column, right?

That's because there are only three kana in this column, while the other columns had five kana each. You might've noticed <u>ye</u> and <u>yi</u> are seemingly missing.

Actually, they used to exist, but now they don't (instead, people use い or え, because they sound pretty similar). So don't worry — you only have to learn three characters in the Y-column.

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

よ	や	ゆ	よ	よ	ゆ	や	よ	ゆ	や

や き に く

やきにく means <u>grilled meat</u>.

ゆ き

ゆき means <u>snow</u>.

よ う か い

ようかい means <u>yokai</u>
(folktale creatures).

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ら

ら is just the R / L sound plus あ, making a ra / la sound.

ら is pronounced like a combination of "rah rah" (like cheering) and "la la la" (like singing!).
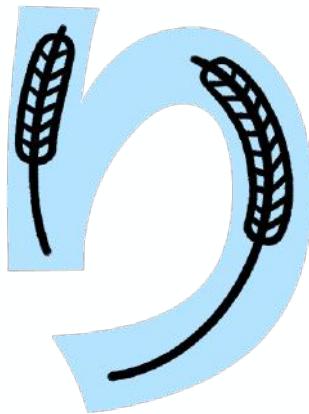
It's a bit hard to explain with English examples, because the R-column sounds are kind of a mixture of r, l, and d sounds. For more details about R-column sounds, check the How To Pronounce The Japanese "R" Sound article and video on tofugu.com.

However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ra.

HOW TO REMEMBER ら

ら looks like a rabbit that's standing and facing left. Look at its big droopy ears. So cute!

PRACTICE WRITING ら

HOW TO PRONOUNCE り

り is just the R /L sound plus い, making a ri / li sound.

り is pronounced like a combination of ree in "reed" and lee in "leek."
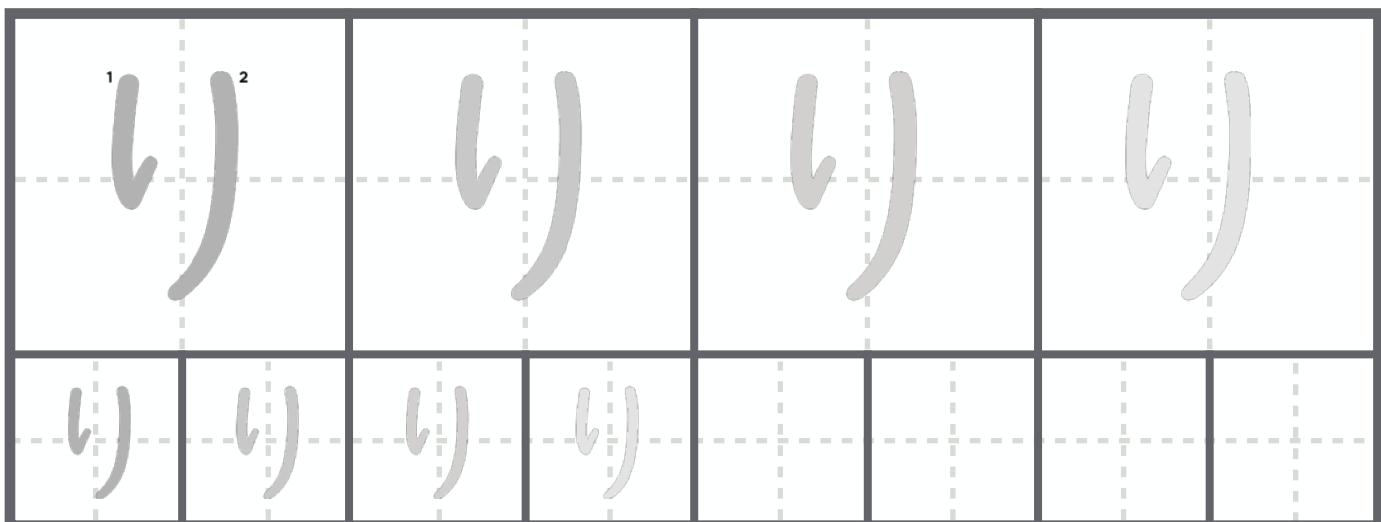
However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ri.

HOW TO REMEMBER り

The reeds are swaying in the wind.

This kana is also commonly written without the connection in the middle, like り, which looks even more reed-like.

PRACTICE WRITING り

HOW TO PRONOUNCE る

る is just the R / L sound plus う, making a ru / lu sound.

It's pronounced like a combination of ru in "rule" or "route" and loo in "loop."
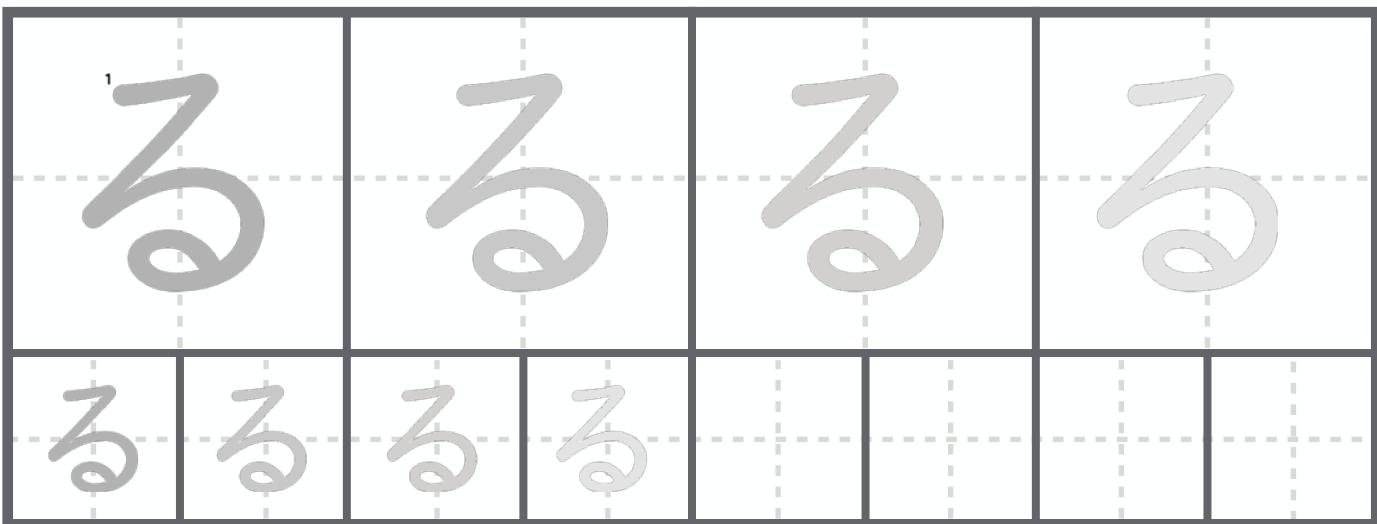
However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ru.

HOW TO REMEMBER る
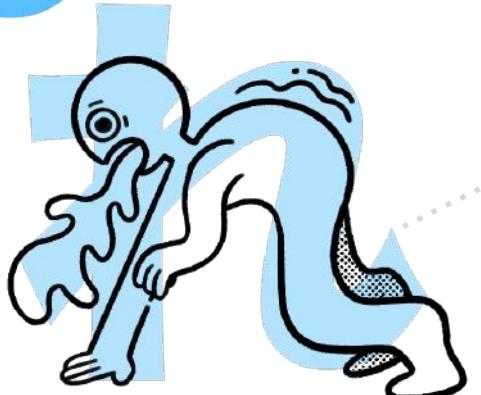
This is just ろ (which you will learn in a sec) with a loop at the end.

る is a crazier route. Why? Because there's a loop at the end.

PRACTICE WRITING る

HOW TO PRONOUNCE れ

れ is just the R /L sound plus え, making a re / le sound.

れ is pronounced like a combination of re in "retch" and le in "led."

However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write re.

HOW TO REMEMBER れ

This looks like a guy kneeling on the ground, retching up his dinner.

This kana is similar to め, わ, ぬ, and ね. What makes this one different is the curve at the back. You can identify this as the guy's knees bending, which makes it clear that he's keeled over retching his guts out.

PRACTICE WRITING れ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ろ

ろ is just the R / L sound plus お, making a ro / lo sound.

ろ is pronounced like a combination of ro in "road" and lo in "load." In British English, it's more like ro in "rot" or lo in "long."

However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ro.

HOW TO REMEMBER ろ

This is the counterpart to る, except this one doesn't have a loop at the end. So this kana is just a plain old road.

PRACTICE WRITING ろ

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

り	ら	ろ	る	れ	り	ろ	る	ら	れ

ら	い	う

らいう means <u>thunderstorm</u>.

り	ゆ	う

りゆう means <u>reason</u>.
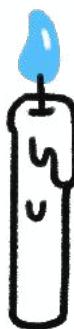
る	す

るす means <u>absent</u>.

れ	き	し
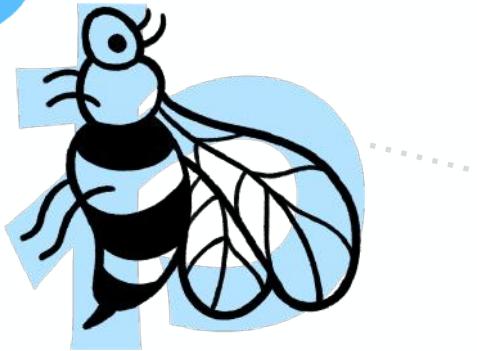
れきし means <u>history</u>.

ろ	う	そ	く

ろうそく means <u>candle</u>.

わ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE わ

わ is just the <u>W</u> sound plus あ, making a <u>wa</u> sound.

It's pronounced like <u>wa</u> in "<u>wa</u>sabi."
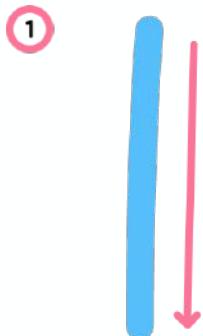
In romaji, write <u>wa</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER わ

This kana looks like a <u>wa</u>sp flying straight up.

It looks similar to れ, ぬ, ね, and め. And it looks especially similar to ね. You know ね is Nelly the cat because of the curl of the tail on the end. So you can imagine the cat chasing this wasp, which is why it's flying straight up to get away. Its butt is also a straight, sharp line. This is its stinger!

PRACTICE WRITING わ

を

を is pronounced like <u>o</u> in "origami" — just like the vowel お. It used to be pronounced like "wo," but now it sounds exactly like お.

In romaji, both <u>o</u> or <u>wo</u> are used for を. To type it, write <u>wo</u>.

HOW TO REMEMBER を

"<u>Who</u>a!" yells the guy with no chin. Someone threw a boomerang into his mouth! That's pretty "<u>who</u>a"-worthy, I think.
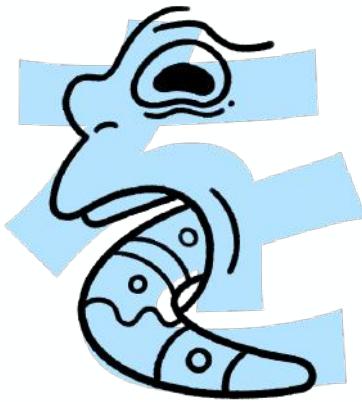
NOTE:

Why two kana for the <u>o</u> sound? Unlike お, を is primarily used as a grammar element called a "particle." It marks the object of a sentence.

PRACTICE WRITING を

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ん

ん is just the <u>N</u> sound — that's it. It's the only kana that consists of a single consonant. It's pronounced like the ending <u>n</u> sound in "pe<u>n</u>."

In romaji, write <u>n</u>. To type it, you sometimes have to type <u>nn</u>. Type double <u>n</u>s, especially before vowels and <u>y</u>, so that it won't turn into another kana that starts with <u>n</u>.

NOTE:

Despite being introduced in the W–column, ん has nothing to do with <u>W</u>. It just doesn't belong anywhere else, and the W–column had some extra space. Simple as that.

HOW TO REMEMBER ん

This kana looks just like a lowercase <u>n</u> in English. They happen to be the same sounds as well. How convenient! <u>nnn</u> んんん.

PRACTICE WRITING ん

①

WELL, THE W-COLUMN WAS STRANGE!

As you could tell, the w-column is a bit weird.

The first character is as you'd expect, but the other two are curveballs — like the notes on each character explained.
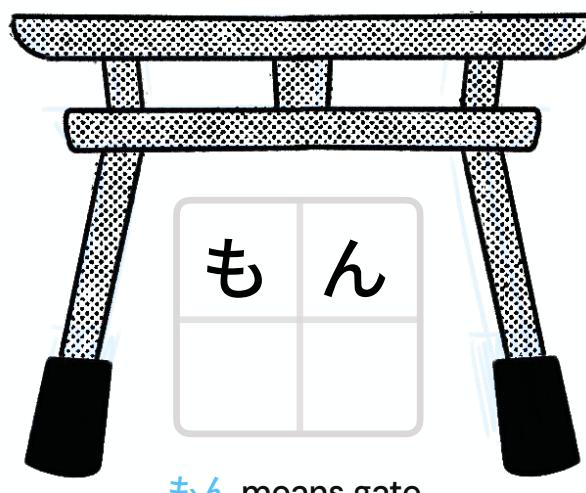
Anyhoo, this was the last column for basic hiragana characters. Congrats!
Do some practice below to learn these irregular characters.

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.
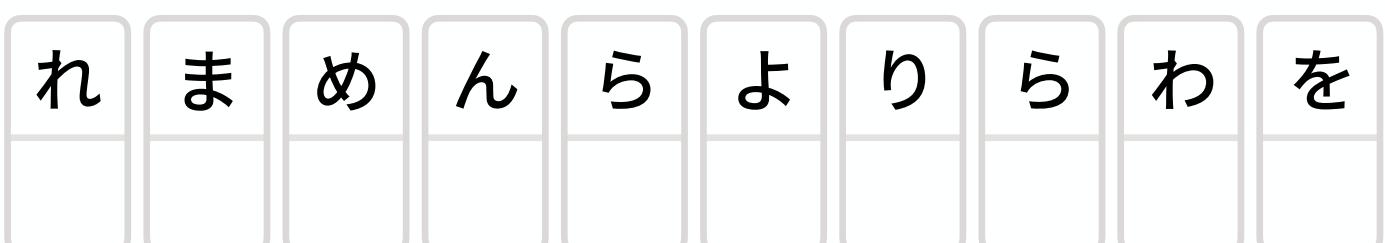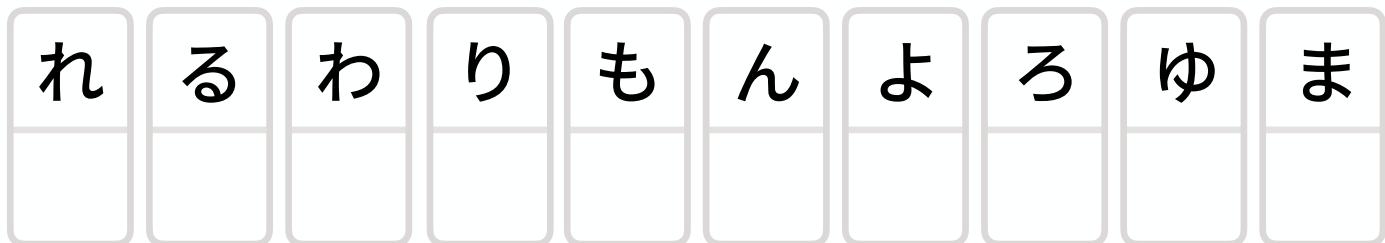
を	ん	わ	ん	わ	を	ん	ん	わ	を

わ	ら	う

わらう means <u>to laugh</u>.

も	ん

もん means <u>gate</u>.

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

れ	る	わ	り	も	ん	よ	ろ	ゆ	ま

み	や	め	る	む	ら	ろ	め	れ	ん

ろ	ま	れ	ん	も	ま	り	ゆ	よ	ら

る	り	ら	を	ん	も	ま	む	り	ん

ら	わ	ゆ	や	も	み	れ	ん	よ	め

れ	ま	め	ん	ら	よ	り	ら	わ	を

LEARN VARIATION HIRAGANA

Congratulations! You've learned all the basic hiragana. Now it's time for you to learn about "variation" hiragana. Don't worry — you've done all the heavy lifting at this point. As long as you know the basic hiragana, learning beyond the basics is easy.

DAKUTEN & HAN-DAKUTEN

Dakuten is a symbol that looks like this → ゛ . Looks like a double quotation mark, right? This dakuten symbol marks hiragana from certain consonant columns and changes their pronunciation. It turns the consonant into a "voiced" or "vibrating" sound, which just means your vocal cords vibrate when the sound is made.

For example, with dakuten added, a K-sound becomes a G-sound. That means か (KA) becomes が (GA), き (KI) becomes ぎ (GI), and so on — like the chart below shows.

	K ➡ G		S ➡ Z		T ➡ D		H ➡ B	
あ A	か KA	が GA	さ SA	ざ ZA	た TA	だ DA	は HA	ば BA
い I	き KI	ぎ GI	し SHI	じ JI	ち CHI	ぢ JI (DI)	ひ HI	び BI
う U	く KU	ぐ GU	す SU	ず ZU	つ TSU	づ ZU (DU)	ふ FU	ぶ BU
え E	け KE	げ GE	せ SE	ぜ ZE	て TE	で DE	へ HE	べ BE
お O	こ KO	ご GO	そ SO	ぞ ZO	と TO	ど DO	ほ HO	ぼ BO

In the same manner, S-sounds become Z-sounds, T-sounds become D-sounds, and H-sounds become B-sounds. Note that "exception" kana like し (SHI) act a little differently. With dakuten, し becomes じ — JI instead of ZI. Also, be aware that on this chart, romaji in parentheses indicate how to type a character if its keyboard input differs from its reading. To type ぢ on your keyboard, you'll type DI, for example, but the pronunciation is still JI.

You've just learned about basic dakuten, but there's actually another variety called "han-dakuten" — indicated by a circular symbol that looks like this → ﾟ . They are phonetically voiceless sounds: unlike voiced sounds (dakuten sounds), your vocal cords don't vibrate when you make them.

It sounds complicated, but should be easy to remember — the han-dakuten can only mark H-sounds and always turns them into P-sounds!

は (HA) – ひ (HI) – ふ (FU) – へ (HE) – ほ (HO) become
ぱ (PA) – ぴ (PI) – ぷ (PU) – ぺ (PE) – ぽ (PO).

Pretty straightforward, right?

H → P	
は HA	ぱ PA
ひ HI	ぴ PI
ふ FU	ぷ PU
へ HE	ぺ PE
ほ HO	ぽ PO

... "Now, how do I remember all this?" Don't worry. Here are some memory hints a.k.a. mnemonics to help you remember the dakuten/han-dakuten conversions.

K → G   The car (か) runs into the guard (が) rail.
S → Z   My saw (さ) just zapped (ざ) me when I tried to use it.
T → D   "TADA!" (た & だ)
H → B   You're saying "hahaha (は)" at the bar (ば) because you've been drinking too much.
H → P   You say "hahaha (は)" so much at the bar that somebody punches (ぱ) you.

Now that we've learned about dakuten and han-dakuten, let's practice (and try not to cheat, of course)!

ぴ	が	ぜ	ざ	べ	ぶ	ど	ぞ	ぎ	ぺ	げ

ず	ば	ぽ	ぢ	で	づ	ぐ	だ	じ	が	ぼ

COMBINATION HIRAGANA

You can combine different types of kana to make some new sounds. Here are the two types of kana you'll be putting together:

1) Kana from the い (I) row.
In other words, kana that end with an <u>I-sound</u> when written in romaji:
き (KI) – し (SHI) – ち (CHI) – に (NI) – ひ (HI) – み (MI) – り (RI),
ぎ (GI) – じ (JI) – ぢ (JI) – び (BI) – ぴ (PI). Note the vowel い itself won't apply here!

2) The small や – ゆ – よ.
The small versions of や (YA) – ゆ (YU) – よ (YO).
Look closely to see how they're almost half the size of the regular kana!
や ゃ
ゆ ゅ
よ ょ

For example, き + ょ = きょ (KYO). し + ゃ = しゃ (SHA). び + ゅ = びゅ (BYU).

Notice that the <u>I</u> at the end of the first kana is dropped when you spell the combination in romaji. You'll also drop the I-sound when you pronounce these combination kana.

Now let's practice!

しゅ	ぎゃ	みょ	しょ	きゅ	りゃ	じゃ	ぴょ	ちゅ	みゃ

きょ	しゃ	りゅ	びゃ	にゅ	ちゃ	にゃ	ぢょ	りょ	じゅ

SMALL っ (QUICK PAUSE)

We also have a small version of つ (TSU), which looks like this → っ. This kana doesn't have a sound. Instead, it adds a quick little pause before a consonant sound in a word.

To express this in romaji, the consonant after a small っ is written twice.

Let's take a look at an example:
Add a small っ between the two kana い (I) and か (KA) to make the word いっか. In this case, you're doubling the K-sound, because that's the consonant following the small っ. So いっか is written IKKA — which is how you pronounce いっか as well as how you type it.

りったい RITTAI
/rit_tai/

かっこ KAKKO
/kak_ko/

いった ITTA
/it_ta/

Practice reading words with the small っ！

いっしょ	しっぽ	がっき	にっき	まっか

けっか	おっと	わっか	べっぷ	きって

... and that's it! You've learned everything in the book.
Now let's wrap up and practice reading all the different kinds of hiragana that you've learned!

む	さ	し	ぶ	きゃ	う	へ	ろ	じ	ぽ
mu	sa	shi	bu	kya	u	he	ro	ji	po

い	め	ち	る	よ	ご	た	ん	も	く
i	me	chi	ru	yo	go	ta	n	mo	ku

そ	て	か	ぬ	つ	わ	しゅ	り	ぐ	ふ
so	te	ka	nu	tsu	wa	shu	ri	gu	fu

せ	ぎゅ	に	と	き	こ	あ	す	な	を
se	gyu	ni	to	ki	ko	a	su	na	wo

う	ぶ	や	お	み	ぴょ	ぢ	ほ	ら	み
u	bu	ya	o	mi	pyo	ji	ho	ra	mi

れ	け	え	す	じょ	ら	ぴ	ゆ	ずっと
re	ke	e	su	jo	ra	pi	yu	zutto

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE HIRAGANA!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

りんご	すみっこ	ひかり	きもち

くだもの	おちゃわん	ひだり	くし

えんぴつ	あした	るりいろ	はる

きいろ	べんきょうする		まるい

かばん	ほんだな	わたあめ

けっていだ	しょくぶつ	いちご

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE HIRAGANA!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

みまもる	じょうだん	こっち	した

ゆり	えんそく	きょうかしょ	みる

かいじゅう	まんがか	りそう	ざっし

ぎゅうたん	おつかれさまです	びょういん

まんげきょう	ざいたく	ひょうげん

しゅるい	りょうようじょ	どりょく

WHAT'S NEXT?

Here are some recommendations for what you can do to keep moving forward with your Japanese proficiency.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE

Ready for more practice? Tofugu has an online quiz tool to assess and quiz your hiragana knowledge, so visit https://kana-quiz.tofugu.com for additional practice! And don't be stressed about mastering hiragana right now. Spacing your practice is really important for retaining knowledge in the long term. So while you continue to study hiragana, you can also start working on other parts of Japanese, like learning katakana and kanji. They're the other characters used in the Japanese writing system.

LEARN KATAKANA

Katakana is similar to hiragana in that each character represents a sound. It's used mainly for loanwords. If you liked learning hiragana through this book, check out Tofugu's Learn Katakana Guide as well!

LEARN KANJI (& JAPANESE VOCABULARY)

Tofugu has an online platform for learning kanji (characters of Chinese origin) and Japanese vocabulary called WaniKani (wanikani.com).

Kanji can be intimidating, because they're complicated and unfamiliar to a lot of learners. But WaniKani makes it easy by breaking them down into parts and giving you memory hints (a.k.a. mnemonics) to help you associate their shapes with their meanings and readings.

WaniKani also uses SRS (Spaced Repetition System) for its flashcard feature. It automatically spaces out your practice so that everything you learn sticks better to your brain. You can learn about 2,000 kanji and more than 6,000 words using WaniKani. If you're fast, you can do that in a little over a year! Try the first three levels for free and see if it works for you.

...This is the end of Tofugu's Learn Hiragana Book. We hope to see you around on your Japanese learning journey!