

JP

JAPANESE WRITING COURSE

Hiragana 1

Eighteen short chapters that teach all 46 basic hiragana, three characters at a time, with romaji throughout: memory hooks, look-alike warnings, real words from the first chapter on, mini-dialogs, and the particles は へ を の も. The first course in the Japanese reading series.

18 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

Contents

Chapter 1	Meet Hiragana: A I U	2
Chapter 2	The Vowel Row: E O	7
Chapter 3	Ka Ki Ku	11
Chapter 4	Ke Ko	15
Chapter 5	Sa Shi Su	19
Chapter 6	Se So	23
Chapter 7	Ta Chi Tsu	27
Chapter 8	Te To	32
Chapter 9	Na Ni Nu	37
Chapter 10	Ne No	42
Chapter 11	Ha Hi Fu	48
Chapter 12	He Ho	54
Chapter 13	Ma Mi Mu	60
Chapter 14	Me Mo	66
Chapter 15	Ya Yu Yo	72
Chapter 16	Ra Ri Ru	78
Chapter 17	Re Ro	85
Chapter 18	Wa Wo N	92

Hiragana 1

Chapter 1 · Meet Hiragana: A I U

Meet Hiragana — ひらがな

Welcome to your first Japanese writing lesson. By the end of this chapter you'll know how Japanese writing works, you'll have learned your first three characters (あい う), and you'll be able to read four real words. Romaji (Japanese in English letters) is shown for everything, so you're never guessing.

Three Scripts, One Language — 三つの文字

Unlike English, Japanese is written with three different kinds of characters, often in the same sentence.

SCRIPT	WHAT IT'S USED FOR	EXAMPLE
ひらがな hiragana	Grammar words and endings, and Japanese words with no kanji. The first script children learn, and the one you start with.	ありがとう arigatō · thank you
カタカナ katakana	Words borrowed from other languages, foreign names, and emphasis. Same sounds as hiragana, different shapes.	コーヒー kōhī · coffee
漢字 kanji	Characters borrowed from Chinese that carry a meaning, such as 日 (sun, day). There are thousands, so you learn them gradually.	日本 Nihon · Japan

Here is one sentence using all three (kanji in orange, hiragana in red, katakana in green). You don't need to read it yet; just notice how the scripts share the work.

私はコーヒを飲みます。

Watashi wa kōhī o nomimasu.

"I drink coffee."

How Hiragana Works — ひらがなのしくみ

Hiragana isn't an alphabet of single letters like A, B, C. Each character stands for a whole **syllable**, a consonant plus a vowel such as ka, shi or mo.

- **46 basic characters** make up the core set. You'll learn them all in this course, about three per chapter.
- **Five vowels** (a, i, u, e, o) can stand alone. Every other sound is a consonant plus one of those vowels, except ん (n), which stands alone.
- **One character = one beat.** Japanese has an even rhythm: each character takes about the same time to say, with no strongly stressed syllables.
- The characters are arranged on a grid called the **gojūon** ("fifty sounds"): five vowel columns and rows of consonants. This is the map of the whole course.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k	か	き	く	け	こ
s	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t	た	ち	つ	て	と
n	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m	ま	み	む	め	も
y	や		ゆ		よ
r	ら	り	る	れ	ろ
w	わ				を
n	ん				

The three characters highlighted are today's. A few sounds change slightly in Roman letters (*si* is written *shi*, *tu* is *tsu*), and we'll meet each of those as we reach it.

✨ Your First Three Characters — あ い う

Japanese vowels are short, clean and steady. Unlike English "ay" or "oh", the sound doesn't glide into a second sound. Say each one, hold your mouth still, and stop.

あ

a

like the "a" in *father*, but short
("ah")

3 strokes · [stroke order ▶](#)

Memory hook: a person throwing their arms out and shouting "Ahh!", with a loop for a head.

い

i

like the "ee" in *see*, but short
("ee")

2 strokes · [stroke order ▶](#)

Memory hook: two slim eels swimming side by side. "eel" gives you the sound.

う

u

like the "oo" in *moon*, but with relaxed, flat lips ("oo")

2 strokes · [stroke order ▶](#)

Memory hook: a little hat on a curved body, a ghost going "ooo".

How to Write a Character — Stroke Order

Japanese characters are written with a set **stroke order** and direction. The general rules are: **top to bottom, left to right**. Following the order keeps the shapes balanced, makes handwriting faster, and it's how Japanese people recognise handwritten characters. Open each "stroke order ▶" link to watch the animation, then write the character on paper 10 times, saying its sound aloud each time. Slow, correct writing beats fast, careless writing.

📖 Read It — Your First Words

You can already read these four words. Each character is one beat, so *ii* is two beats.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	あい	ai	love	<i>a + i, slide quickly from "ah" to "ee"</i>
2	いい	ii	good	<i>two beats: "ee-ee", not one long "ee"</i>
3	あう	au	to meet	<i>a + u</i>
4	いう	iu	to say	<i>often heard as "yuu" in everyday speech</i>

Romaji Is a Helper, Not the Goal

Romaji is shown everywhere in this course so you can check yourself, but try to read the Japanese first and glance at the romaji afterwards. In the next courses the romaji will gradually disappear. Also remember that one hiragana always makes the same sound, so there are almost no spelling surprises (the only exceptions are the particles は, へ and を, which you will meet later), which makes hiragana the easy part of learning Japanese.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Which sound does あ make: *a*, *i* or *u*?

▼ Show answer

a ("ah", as in *father*).

2. Read these aloud: い・う・あ

▼ Show answer

i · u · a

3. Read these words and say what they mean: あい・あう・いい

▼ Show answer

ai (love) · au (to meet) · ii (good)

4. Write these in hiragana: *ii* · *au* · *ai* (check the stroke order as you write).

▼ Show answer

いい · あう · あい

5. How many beats does いい have, and how many strokes does あ have?

▼ Show answer

Two beats (one per character, "ee-ee"). あ has 3 strokes.

6. Which script would you use to write the English loanword "coffee", and which for the ending of a verb?

▼ Show answer

Loanword: **katakana** (コーヒー). Verb ending: **hiragana** (as in みます).

Coming Up in Chapter 2

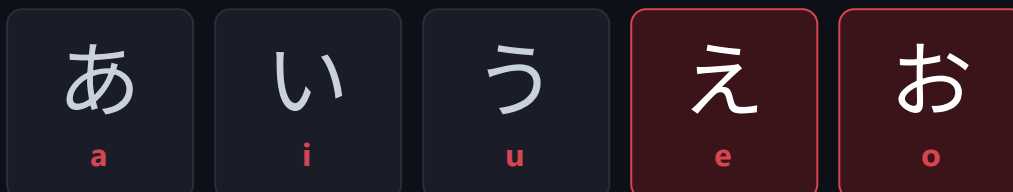
You've learned three of the five vowels. Next up: え (e) and お (o), which completes the vowel row, and you'll be able to read いえ (house), うえ (above), あお (blue) and いいえ (no).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 2 · The Vowel Row: E O

🌸 Completing the Vowels — あいうえお

In Chapter 1 you learned あ い う. Today you add え and お, which completes the first row of hiragana: the five vowels. You'll also read your first words that use them, including "yes" and "no".



The five Japanese vowels: **a · i · u · e · o**. Japanese children recite this row like English children recite their ABC.

🌟 Two New Characters — え お

Remember: each vowel is short, pure and steady. Don't let it glide into a second sound the way English "ay" and "oh" do.

え

e

like the "e" in *bed* ("eh"), short, with no "ee" or "ay" glide

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an emu in profile, with a short head at the top and a long tail sweeping out behind.

お

o

like the "o" in *more* ("oh"), short and pure, no "oo" glide

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a surprised person saying "Oh!", with a little spark at the upper right.

Look-Alike Warning: あ and お

あ (a) and お (o) look alike: both have a horizontal line, a vertical line and a loop. The quick test is the **small dot at the upper right**: お has it, あ doesn't. Check for the dot every time you read or

write one of these two.

The Romaji "e" Is "eh", Never "ee"

In romaji for Japanese, *e* always means the "eh" in *bed*, not the English letter name "ee". So *ie* sounds like "ee-eh", and the word *ee* (ええ, "yes") sounds like "eh-eh" (two short *e* beats), not "ee". That's the one place romaji can mislead an English speaker, so trust the pronunciation hints on this page.

Read It — New Words

Every word below uses only the five vowels. Remember that each character is one beat, so a word of three characters has three beats.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	いえ	ie	house, home	<i>i + e, two beats ("ee-eh")</i>
2	うえ	ue	above, on top	<i>u + e, two beats ("oo-eh")</i>
3	あお	ao	blue	<i>a + o, as in "ah-oh"</i>
4	ええ	ee	yes (polite)	<i>"eh-eh", two e beats</i>
5	いいえ	iiie	no	<i>three beats: "ee-ee-eh"</i>
6	おい	oi	hey! (informal)	<i>a bit rough, used with close friends</i>

The single characters are words too, little reactions you'll hear all the time:

WORD	ROMAJI	MEANING
あ	a	"Ah!" / "Oh!" (noticing something)

WORD

ROMAJI

MEANING

え

e

"Eh?" / "Really?" (surprise)

Review: Words from Chapter 1

Cover the English and read these again: あい (ai, love) · いい (ii, good) · あう (au, to meet) ·

いう (iu, to say). Regular, short review is how kana stick, so reread the previous chapter's words at the start of each lesson.

Real Japanese Tip — あいうえお Is Japan's "ABC"

Japanese people learn あいうえお first, and it's also the first row of the order used in Japanese dictionaries and phone contact lists. The full grid you saw in Chapter 1 (*gojūon*) is read in that order: あいうえお → かきくけこ → さしすせそ and so on. Learning the characters in this order, as this course does, means you also learn the alphabetical order for free.

**Try It Yourself — れんしゅう**

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the five vowels in order, with their romaji: あ い う え お

▼ Show answer

a · i · u · e · o ("ah, ee, oo, eh, oh").

2. Which of え and お has 3 strokes, and what quick test tells お apart from あ?

▼ Show answer

お has 3 strokes (え has 2). お has a small dot at the upper right; あ doesn't.

3. Read these words and give their meanings: いえ · うえ · あお

▼ Show answer

ie (house) · ue (above) · ao (blue)

4. Write in hiragana: *ie* · *ee* (yes) · *iie* (no)

▼ Show answer

いえ · ええ · いいえ

5. How many beats does いいえ have?

▼ Show answer

Three (one per character: ee-ee-eh).

6. Someone points at a picture and you want to say "Is it blue? Yes." Which of the words from today would you use for "blue" and for "yes"?

▼ Show answer

blue = あお (ao); yes = ええ (ee).

Coming Up in Chapter 3

You've learned the whole vowel row. From now on every new character is a **consonant + vowel**. Next up: the first consonant row, starting with か き く (ka, ki, ku), and words like かお (face), あか (red) and かう (to buy).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 3 · Ka Ki Ku

🌸 The K Row Begins — か き く

You know the five vowels. From now on, almost every new character is a **consonant** + **a vowel**. Today you meet the first consonant, **k**, with か (ka), き (ki) and く (ku). The last two, け and こ, come in Chapter 4.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ

Read down a column: $k + a = ka$, $k + i = ki$, $k + u = ku$. Every row of hiragana works this way.

✨ Three New Characters — か き く

か

ka

like "ca" in *car*, short ("kah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a karate fighter in mid-kick, with a little "whoosh" mark at the right.

き

ki

like "key", but short ("kee")

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a key, with two cross bars like a key's teeth.

く

ku

like "coo" in *cuckoo*, with relaxed lips ("koo")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a cuckoo's beak opening to the right, "ku-ku".

The Japanese "K" Is Softer

An English "k" at the start of a word comes with a small puff of air (hold your hand in front of your mouth and say "*key*"). The Japanese "k" has much less puff, closer to the "k" in "*sky*". Try saying "*sky*", then drop the "s": that is a Japanese *ki*.

Stroke Count: き and く

く is the simplest character in the whole set: **one stroke**, written from the top right, down to the left-hand point, then down to the right. き has **4 strokes** in handwriting, although in some printed fonts the bottom strokes are joined together, so it can look like 3. Use the stroke-order links and copy the handwriting version.

Read It — New Words

Now that you have the K row, you can read real, everyday words. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	かお	kao	face	<i>ka + o</i>
2	あか	aka	red	<i>a + ka; the colour as a noun</i>
3	いか	ika	squid	<i>i + ka</i>
4	えき	eki	station	<i>very useful for travel</i>
5	あき	aki	autumn	<i>a + ki</i>
6	おか	oka	hill	<i>o + ka</i>
7	かう	kau	to buy	<i>a verb in dictionary form</i>
8	きく	kiku	to listen, to hear, to ask	<i>a verb</i>
9	いく	iku	to go	<i>a verb; one of the most common</i>
10	かく	kaku	to write	<i>a verb; a good one for this course</i>

Real Japanese Tip — Verbs Always End in "u"

Look at the four verbs above: *kau*, *kiku*, *iku*, *kaku*. The dictionary form of every Japanese verb ends in the sound **-u**, written with one of う, く, ぐ, す, つ, ぬ, ぶ, む, る. Once you know that, you can recognise a verb at a glance. You'll meet the other endings (す, つ, む and the rest) as we learn those rows.

Review: Words from Chapters 1 and 2

Cover the English and read these again: あい (love) · いい (good) · あう (to meet) · いえ (house) · うえ (above) · あお (blue) · ええ (yes) · いいえ (no). And now you can say "red" and "blue" as a pair: あか and あお.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: か · き · く

▼ Show answer

ka · ki · ku

2. Which character has 1 stroke, and which has 4?

▼ Show answer

く has 1 stroke; き has 4.

3. Read and translate: かお · えき · いく

▼ Show answer

kao (face) · eki (station) · iku (to go)

4. Write in hiragana: *aka* (red) · *kaku* (to write) · *oka* (hill)

▼ Show answer

あか・かく・おか

5. How is the Japanese "k" different from the English "k" in *key*?

▼ Show answer

It has less of a puff of air, closer to the "k" in *sky*.

6. What sound do the verbs かう, きく, いく and かく all end in?

▼ Show answer

-u. Every Japanese verb in dictionary form ends in a u-sound.

Coming Up in Chapter 4

You've learned three of the five K characters. Next up: け (ke) and こ (ko), which complete the K row, and words like ここ (here), こえ (voice), いけ (pond) and あおい (blue, adjective).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 4 · Ke Ko

🌸 Finishing the K Row — け こ

Two more characters complete the K row: *け* (ke) and *こ* (ko). With them you'll know ten characters in total, enough to read a whole new batch of everyday words, including three adjectives.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ

Ten down, thirty-six to go. Today's two are highlighted.

✨ Two New Characters — け こ

け

ke

like the "ke" in *kettle*, short ("keh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *kettle*: the vertical line on the left is the handle, and the rest is the spout and the body.

こ

ko

like the "co" in *core*, short and pure ("koh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a stack of two coins, one on top of the other.

Look-Alike Heads-Up: け Is Part of a Family

け starts with a vertical line on the left, just like は (ha) and ほ (ho), which come later in the course. For now, remember that け has **no loop at the bottom**, whereas は and ほ do. We'll compare all three side by side when we reach the H row.



Read It — New Words

With ten characters you can now read these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ここ	koko	here	<i>ko + ko</i>
2	こえ	koe	voice	<i>ko + e</i>
3	いけ	ike	pond	<i>i + ke</i>
4	こい	koi	carp (koi fish); also "love"	<i>the famous garden fish</i>
5	こけ	koke	moss	<i>ko + ke</i>
6	くうき	kuuki	air; atmosphere	<i>three beats: "ku-u-ki"</i>
7	あかい	akai	red (adjective)	<i>"is red"; used before a noun</i>
8	あおい	aoi	blue (adjective)	<i>a + o + i</i>
9	おおきい	ookii	big	<i>4 beats: "o-o-ki-i"</i>
10	おい	ooi	many, a lot	<i>o-o-i</i>

Words Ending in い — Many Are Adjectives

Look at あかい (red), あおい (blue) and おおきい (big). Many Japanese adjectives end in い, and they work like a verb ("is red"): あかい on its own means "(it) is red". You'll meet them properly in the conversation courses; for now, notice the pattern. Also notice おお: when you see the same vowel twice in a row, say it as **two beats** ("o-o"), a long sound. Long vowels get full attention in a later course.

Real Japanese Tip — "Ko" Means Near Me

ここ (koko, "here") is the first of a family of words that all start with こ when something is *close to the speaker*: ここ (here), これ (this), この (this ...). You will learn the "that" and "where" versions (そこ, あそこ, どこ) in the next chapters, which gives you a free vocabulary pattern.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: かお (face) · あか (red) · いか (squid) · えき (station) · あき (autumn) · おか (hill) · かう (to buy) · きく (to listen) · いく (to go) · かく (to write).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole K row in order: か き く け こ

▼ Show answer

ka · ki · ku · ke · ko

2. Which of け and こ has 2 strokes?

▼ Show answer

こ has 2 strokes. け has 3.

3. Read and translate: ここ · いけ · くうき

▼ Show answer

koko (here) · ike (pond) · kuuki (air)

4. Write in hiragana: koe (voice) · ike (pond) · kuuki (air)

▼ Show answer

こえ・いけ・くうき

5. Read these three adjectives and say what they mean: あかい・あおい・おおき
い

▼ Show answer

akai (red) · aoi (blue) · ookii (big)

6. How many beats does おおきい have?

▼ Show answer

Four: o-o-ki-i (one per character).

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The K row is complete. Next up: the first S characters, さ し す (sa, shi, su), plus words like すし (sushi), さけ (sake), しお (salt) and いす (chair). Watch out: *shi* is spelled with an *h*.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 5 · Sa Shi Su

🌸 The S Row Begins — さ し す

The second consonant row is *s*, with さ (sa), し (shi) and す (su). You'll also meet your first spelling surprise: し is written shi in romaji, not si. With thirteen characters you can read a very useful set of words, including sushi and delicious.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ

Thirteen characters known. The last two S characters, せ and そ, come in Chapter 6.

✨ Three New Characters — さ し す

さ

sa

like "sa" in *sun*, but with an open "ah" vowel ("sah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a sailor's anchor: a crossbar, a shaft and a curved base.

し

shi

like "she" ("shee"), short

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a fishing hook: *she* caught the fish.

す

su

like "sue" with relaxed lips ("soo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a curling prawn with a loop, the topping on *sushi*.

Look-Alike Warning: き and さ

き (*ki*) and さ (*sa*) are easy to confuse. The test: き **has two horizontal bars** across the stem, and さ **has only one**. That's also why き has 4 strokes and さ has 3. Check the number of bars each time you read one of these.

Why "Shi" and Not "Si"?

The sound in し isn't a plain "s" followed by "i"; it's "sh" as in *ship*, so the usual romaji (the Hepburn system) writes it *shi*. You may see *si* on some old signs and in some textbooks, but it means the same character. We'll meet a few more of these spelling changes (*chi*, *tsu*, *fu*) as we go.

Read It — New Words

Thirteen characters give you a rich batch of everyday words. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	すし	sushi	sushi	<i>su + shi</i>
2	さけ	sake	sake; alcohol; salmon	<i>three meanings, same spelling</i>
3	しお	shio	salt	<i>shi + o</i>
4	いす	isu	chair	<i>i + su</i>
5	かさ	kasa	umbrella	<i>ka + sa</i>
6	あさ	asa	morning	<i>a + sa</i>
7	あし	ashi	foot, leg	<i>a + shi</i>
8	うし	ushi	cow	<i>u + shi</i>
9	いし	ishi	stone	<i>i + shi</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
10	しか	shika	deer	<i>shi + ka</i>
11	すき	suki	liking; "like"	<i>used to say you like something</i>
12	おいしい	oishii	delicious	<i>four beats: "o-i-shi-i"; an adjective</i>

Real Japanese Tip — The Vanishing Vowel

Between certain sounds, and at the end of some words, Japanese people often whisper the vowels **i** and **u**. So すき (suki, "like") sounds almost like "ski", and the polite ending です (desu), which you'll meet soon, sounds almost like "dess". Don't worry about it yet, just listen for it: it doesn't change the spelling, and you still write every character.

Real Japanese Tip — "Sake" Means More Than Rice Wine

In Japan, さけ (often おさけ) is the general word for alcohol. The rice wine that Westerners call "sake" is 日本酒 (nihonshu) in Japanese. The same spelling さけ also means "salmon" (written with a different kanji), and the context tells you which is meant.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: ここ (here) · こえ (voice) · いけ (pond) · くうき (air) · あかい (red) · おおきい (big) · えき (station) · いく (to go).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: さ · し · す

▼ Show answer

sa · shi · su

2. How can you tell き and さ apart?

▼ Show answer

き has two horizontal bars (4 strokes); さ has one (3 strokes).

3. Read and translate: すし · しお · いす

▼ Show answer

sushi (sushi) · shio (salt) · isu (chair)

4. Write in hiragana: *asa* (morning) · *suki* (like) · *oishii* (delicious)

▼ Show answer

あさ · すき · おいしい

5. Read these animal and object words: うし · しか · かさ

▼ Show answer

ushi (cow) · shika (deer) · kasa (umbrella)

6. How is し written in romaji, and how many strokes does it have?

▼ Show answer

shi (with an h), and it has just 1 stroke.

Coming Up in Chapter 6

Two characters finish the S row: せ (se) and そ (so). You'll then be able to read せかい (world), そこ (there), あせ (sweat), そう (so, that's right) and せき (seat).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 6 · Se So

🌸 Finishing the S Row — せ そ

Two characters complete the S row: せ (se) and そ (so). That makes **fifteen characters** in total, and today's reading words include a useful family of place words: here, there, over there.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ

Fifteen down, thirty-one to go. Next chapter starts the T row.

✨ Two New Characters — せ そ

せ

se

like "se" in set, short ("seh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a seesaw: a long board with a pivot, and a hooked foot at the bottom.

そ

so

like "so" in saw, short and pure ("soh")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a zig-zag of thread being sewn, "so" sounds like "sew".

Stroke Count: そ

そ is written in **one stroke** in standard handwriting, but in many printed fonts the short top bar is separated from the zig-zag, so it looks like 2. Follow the stroke-order animation and write it in one flowing movement.



Read It — New Words

Fifteen characters let you read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	せかい	sekai	world	<i>se + ka + i</i>
2	あせ	ase	sweat	<i>a + se</i>
3	せき	seki	seat; also a cough	<i>two meanings, same spelling</i>
4	うそ	uso	lie	<i>u + so; also used as "No way!"</i>
5	そこ	soko	there (near you)	<i>so + ko</i>
6	あそこ	asoko	over there	<i>far from both of us</i>
7	そう	sō	so; that's right	<i>"soh-oh": a long sound (2 beats)</i>
8	そうか	sō ka	I see; oh, really?	<i>a very common reaction</i>
9	おそい	osoi	slow; late	<i>an adjective</i>
10	さそう	sasou	to invite	<i>a verb: ends in う</i>

Real Japanese Tip — Ko, So, A, Do

In Chapter 4 you met **ここ** (here, near me). Today's **そこ** and **あそこ** complete a four-part pattern that Japanese uses everywhere:

STARTS WITH	MEANS	PLACE WORD	MEANING
こ	near me	こ ころ koko	here

STARTS WITH	MEANS	PLACE WORD	MEANING
そ	near you	そこ soko	there
あ	far from both	あそこ asoko	over there
ど (later)	question	doko	where?

The same four starting sounds turn up in *this, that, that over there, which?*, so you'll learn the whole family at once. (We'll write *doko* when we reach ど.)

Real Japanese Tip — そう and そうか

そう ("sō") means "so" or "that's right", and そうか ("sō ka") is "I see" or "oh, is that so?": the reaction you'll hear most in a conversation. Even at this stage you can use it. Notice the doubled vowel in そう: it's said as two beats, "so-o", a long sound.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: すし (sushi) · しお (salt) · いす (chair) · かさ (umbrella) · あさ (morning) · あし (foot) · うし (cow) · いし (stone) · しか (deer) · すき (like) · おいしい (delicious).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole S row in order: さ し す せ そ

▼ Show answer

sa · shi · su · se · so

2. Which of せ and そ is written in one stroke?

▼ Show answer

そ is one stroke. せ has 3.

3. Read and translate: せかい・あせ・うそ

▼ Show answer

sekai (world)・ase (sweat)・uso (lie)

4. Write in hiragana: *soko* (there)・*asoko* (over there)・*osoi* (slow)

▼ Show answer

そこ・あそこ・おそい

5. Of ここ, そこ and あそこ, which means "over there, far from both of us"?

▼ Show answer

あそこ (asoko). ここ = here, そこ = there (near you).

6. You hear a friend say そうか. What are they telling you?

▼ Show answer

"I see" or "Oh, really?", a reaction that shows they've understood.

Coming Up in Chapter 7

The T row begins: たちつ (ta, chi, tsu). Two of them have spelling surprises, since *chi* and *tsu* aren't written *ti* and *tu*. You'll then read たこ (octopus), うた (song), くち (mouth), つき (moon) and つくえ (desk).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 7 · Ta Chi Tsu

🌸 The T Row Begins — た ち つ

The third consonant row is **t**, with **た** (ta), **ち** (chi) and **つ** (tsu). Two of them break the pattern in romaji: they're chi and tsu, not ti and tu. By the end you'll know **eighteen characters** and be able to read your first set of numbers and opposites.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と

Eighteen characters known, twenty-eight to go. て and と come in Chapter 8.

✨ Three New Characters — た ち つ

た

ta

like "ta" in *tar*, short ("tah")

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: "ta-da!": a performer with arms out on the left, and a little flag on the right.

ち

chi

like "chee" in *cheese*, short ("chee")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *cheerleader* leaping, with a pompom held high.

つ

tsu

"ts" as at the end of *cats*, then "oo" ("tsoo")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *tsunami* wave curling over.

Spelling Surprise: Chi and Tsu

The Japanese "t" sounds change before the vowels *i* and *u*. *ti* becomes **chi** (as in *cheese*) and *tu* becomes **tsu** (as in *tsunami*). So the T row goes **ta • chi • tsu • te • to**, and the romaji spelling follows the actual sound. The "ts" is easier than it looks: it's the end of the English word *cats*, followed by "oo".

Look-Alike Warnings: ち and さ, つ and し

ち and さ are close in shape: さ is written in **3 strokes**, ち in **2**, so count the strokes while you're learning them. つ and し are both a single curved stroke: し (*shi*) is tall and ends by curving up like a fishing hook, whereas つ (*tsu*) is wide and flat like a wave curling over.

The Japanese "T" Is Softer Too

Like the Japanese "k" you met in Chapter 3, the Japanese "t" has less puff of air than the English "t", and the tongue tends to touch the back of the upper front teeth rather than the ridge behind them. Say "stop", then drop the "s": that's closer to a Japanese *ta*.

Read It — New Words

With eighteen characters you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	たこ	tako	octopus	<i>ta + ko</i>
2	うた	uta	song	<i>u + ta</i>
3	くち	kuchi	mouth	<i>ku + chi</i>
4	つき	tsuki	moon	<i>tsu + ki</i>
5	つくえ	tsukue	desk	<i>three beats: tsu-ku-e</i>
6	いち	ichi	one (1)	<i>your first number</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
7	ちち	chichi	(my) father	<i>used for your own father</i>
8	つかう	tsukau	to use	<i>a verb: ends in う</i>
9	たかい	takai	high, tall; expensive	<i>two meanings, one word</i>
10	あつい	atsui	hot	<i>an adjective</i>
11	ちいさい	chiisai	small	<i>the opposite of おおきい (big)</i>
12	ちかい	chikai	near, close	<i>an adjective</i>

Real Japanese Tip — Opposites in a Pair

Learning words in opposite pairs makes them stick. You now know おおきい (big) and ちいさい (small); おそい (slow) will get its partner, the word for "fast", in a later chapter. Also notice that たかい means both "tall" and "expensive" (written with the same kanji), so Japanese people use it for a high mountain or a high price.

A Peek Ahead — The Small つ

Later you will meet a **small** つ, written つ. It isn't "tsu" at all: it marks a short pause that doubles the next consonant (as in きっぷ, "ticket", said "kip-pu"). It belongs to a later course. For now, whenever you see a full-size つ, read it as *tsu*.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: せかい (world) · あせ (sweat) · うそ (lie) · そこ (there) · あそこ (over there) · そう (so) · そうか (I see) · おそい (slow) · さそう (to invite).



Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: た・ち・つ

▼ Show answer

ta · chi · tsu

2. How many strokes do た, ち and つ have?

▼ Show answer

た has 4, ち has 2, つ has 1.

3. Read and translate: たこ・つき・くち

▼ Show answer

tako (octopus) · tsuki (moon) · kuchi (mouth)

4. Write in hiragana: uta (song) · tsukue (desk) · chiisai (small)

▼ Show answer

うた・つくえ・ちいさい

5. What is the opposite of おおきい (big)?

▼ Show answer

ちいさい (chiisai, small).

6. How are ち and つ written in romaji, and why not *ti* and *tu*?

▼ Show answer

chi and *tsu*. The spelling follows the real sound: *ti* and *tu* change to "chee" and "tsoo" in Japanese.

Coming Up in Chapter 8

Two characters finish the T row: テ (te) and ト (to). You'll then read テ (hand), トけい (clock), ことし (this year) and テつ (iron), and the first short phrases begin to appear.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 8 · Te To

🌸 Finishing the T Row — て と

Two characters complete the T row: て (te) and と (to). That brings you to **twenty characters**, which is enough to read short, real conversations, so this is where the first mini-dialogs appear.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と

Twenty down, twenty-six to go. The N row comes next.

✨ Two New Characters — て と

て

te

like "te" in *ten*, short ("teh")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a hand reaching out with curled fingers. (て is also the Japanese word for "hand".)

と

to

like "to" in *toe*, short and pure ("toh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *toe* with a small splinter stuck in its side (the short first stroke).

📖 Read It — New Words

Twenty characters give you a big batch. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	て	te	hand	<i>a word as well as a character</i>
2	とけい	tokei	clock, watch	<i>to + ke + i</i>
3	とし	kotoshi	this year	<i>ko + to + shi</i>
4	とし	toshi	year; age	<i>also used for someone's age</i>
5	てつ	tetsu	iron (the metal)	<i>te + tsu</i>
6	おと	oto	sound, noise	<i>o + to</i>
7	そと	soto	outside	<i>so + to</i>
8	いと	ito	thread	<i>i + to</i>
9	こと	koto	thing, matter	<i>an abstract "thing"</i>
10	いつ	itsu	when?	<i>a question word</i>
11	たいせつ	taisetsu	important, precious	<i>four beats: ta-i-se-tsu</i>
12	あたたかい	ataakai	warm	<i>five beats; an adjective</i>

Your First Mini-Dialogs

You can already read three short, casual exchanges. Read the Japanese first, then look at the romaji and English.

① Is It Hot? — あつい？

② Delicious? — おいしい？

A:

そこ、あつい？

soko, atsui?

Is it hot there?

B:

ええ、あつい！

ee, atsui!

Yes, it's hot!

A:

おいしい？

oishii?

Is it delicious?

B:

ええ、おいしい。

ee, oishii.

Yes, it's delicious.

A:

そうか。

sō ka.

I see.

③ A Trip — いつ？

A:

いく？

iku?

Are you going?

B:

ええ、いく。

ee, iku.

Yes, I'm going.

A:

いつ？

itsu?

When?

B:

ことし！

kotoshi!

This year!

How These Sentences Work — Punctuation, Questions and No Spaces

- 。 is the Japanese full stop and 、 is the comma. They look like small circles and slanted ticks, and they sit at the foot of the line.
- The little word **か** at the end of a sentence turns it into a question, as in そうか ("Is that so? / I see"). In casual speech, you can also make a question with a **rising voice** and a ? , as in おいしい?
- Japanese is normally written **without spaces** between words. Children's books add spaces to help beginners, and so does the romaji in this course. Soon you'll see where the words break without any help.

Real Japanese Tip — Casual Speech Is Short

These dialogs use the casual style, the way close friends talk: short, with no extra polite endings. The polite style (the one you'd use with a stranger, a shopkeeper or a teacher) adds endings such as **です** and **ます**. You'll meet them in the conversation courses. Casual speech is fine with friends, but with strangers, always choose the polite style.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: たこ (octopus) · うた (song) · くち (mouth) · つき (moon) · つくえ (desk) · いち (one) · つかう (to use) · たかい (high; expensive) · あつい (hot) · ちいさい (small) · ちかい (near).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole T row in order: た ち つ て と

▼ Show answer

ta · chi · tsu · te · to

2. How many strokes do て and と have?

▼ Show answer

て has 1 stroke. と has 2.

3. Read and translate: とけい・ことし・そと

▼ Show answer

tokei (clock, watch) · kotoshi (this year) · soto (outside)

4. Write in hiragana: oto (sound) · itsu (when) · taisetsu (important)

▼ Show answer

おと・いつ・たいせつ

5. Read this exchange and say what it means: いく？ ええ、いく。 いつ？
ことし！

▼ Show answer

"Are you going?" "Yes, I'm going." "When?" "This year!"

6. What do 、 and 。 mean?

▼ Show answer

、 is the comma and 。 is the full stop (period).

Coming Up in Chapter 9

The N row begins: な に ぬ (na, ni, nu). You'll then read いぬ (dog), なつ (summer), にく (meat) and さかな (fish). Watch out for ぬ: it is easy to confuse with め, which you'll meet later in the course.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 9 · Na Ni Nu

🌸 The N Row Begins — な に ん

The fourth consonant row is **n**, with な (na), に (ni) and ん (nu). That makes **twenty-three characters**, and with them you can read the words for what, you, country and dog.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の

Twenty-three down, twenty-three to go: exactly halfway. ん and の come in Chapter 10.

✨ Three New Characters — な に ん

な

na

like "na" in *nap*, but with an open "ah" ("nah")

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *nanny* kneeling beside a cross-shaped toy.

に

ni

like "knee" ("nee"), short

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a bent leg: the long line is the thigh, and the two bars are the *knee*.

ぬ

nu

like "noo" in *noodle*, with relaxed lips

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a tangle of *noodles*, with a loop at the bottom right.

Look-Alike Heads-Up: に and the け-は-ほ Family; め and the Loop Family

に belongs to the family of characters that begin with a **vertical line on the left**: け, に, は and ほ. に is the simplest, with just two short bars to its right, no loop. め is the first of a look-alike group: め, ね and め all finish at the bottom right. め and ね end in a **loop**, while め ends in a plain sweep. Their cousins の, れ and わ look similar too. You'll meet the rest over the next few chapters, and we'll compare them carefully. For now, learn め's shape well: a short stroke at the top, then a long stroke ending in a loop.

Read It — New Words

Twenty-three characters give you plenty to read. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	なに	nani	what?	<i>na + ni; a question word</i>
2	あなた	anata	you	<i>a + na + ta</i>
3	くに	kuni	country; home region	<i>ku + ni</i>
4	いぬ	inu	dog	<i>i + nu</i>
5	さかな	sakana	fish	<i>sa + ka + na</i>
6	にく	niku	meat	<i>ni + ku</i>
7	かに	kani	crab	<i>ka + ni</i>
8	なつ	natsu	summer	<i>na + tsu</i>
9	にし	nishi	west	<i>ni + shi</i>
10	なか	naka	inside, middle	<i>na + ka</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
11	おなか	onaka	stomach, belly	<i>the polite お + なか</i>
12	ない	nai	there isn't; not	<i>the word for "not / none"</i>

🗨️ Mini-Dialogs

① What Is It? — なに？

A:

なに？

nani?

What is it?

B:

さかな！

sakana!

Fish!

A:

おいしい？

oishii?

Is it delicious?

B:

ええ、おいしい。

ee, oishii.

Yes, it's delicious.

② A Big Dog — いぬ！

A:

そこ、なに？

soko, nani?

What's there?

B:

いぬ！

inu!

A dog!

A:

おおきい？

ookii?

Is it big?

B:

ええ、おおきい！

ee, ookii!

Yes, big!

Real Japanese Tip — Be Careful with あなた

あなた means "you", but Japanese speakers use it rarely, because saying "you" straight to someone can sound blunt or distant. Instead they use the person's **name** (plus a title), even when talking directly to them. You'll find あなた in textbooks and songs, and a wife might say it to her husband

affectionately, but in real life, drop "you" and use the name. That's why the conversation courses concentrate on names and polite forms.

Real Japanese Tip — ない Means "Not" or "There Isn't"

ない is the word for "there isn't / doesn't exist", and it's also the ending that makes verbs and adjectives negative (you'll see it at the end of many words soon). Keep it in mind: whenever you see ～ない at the end of a word, think "not".

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: て (hand) · とけい (clock) · ことし (this year) · おと (sound) · そと (outside) · こと (thing) · いつ (when) · たいせつ (important) · あたたかい (warm).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: な · に · ぬ

▼ Show answer

na · ni · nu

2. How many strokes do な, に and ぬ have?

▼ Show answer

な has 4, に has 3, ぬ has 2.

3. Read and translate: いぬ · さかな · くに

▼ Show answer

inu (dog) · sakana (fish) · kuni (country)

4. Write in hiragana: *nani* (what?) · *anata* (you) · *natsu* (summer)

▼ Show answer

なに · あなた · なつ

5. Read and translate: かに · にく · にし

▼ Show answer

kani (crab) · niku (meat) · nishi (west)

6. Why do Japanese people often avoid saying あなた?

▼ Show answer

It can sound blunt or distant, so they use the person's name (with a title) instead.

Coming Up in Chapter 10

Two characters finish the N row: ね (ne) and の (no). You'll then read ねこ (cat), この (this), その (that) and あの (that over there). Warning: ね looks very like め, so you'll compare the two side by side.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 10 · Ne No

🌸 Finishing the N Row — ね の

Two characters complete the N row: **ね** (ne) and **の** (no). That brings you to **twenty-five characters**. Today you'll also learn one of the most useful little words in Japanese grammar, **の**, which works like "of" or "'s", and the sentence-ending **ね**, which means "isn't it?"

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の

Twenty-five down, twenty-one to go. The H row comes next.

✨ Two New Characters — ね の

ね

ne

like "ne" in *net*, short ("neh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a curled-up cat with its tail wrapped round it: *ne*-ko, the Japanese word for "cat".

の

no

like "no" in *note*, short and pure ("noh")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a round, defiant "*No!*", a mouth saying it, or a no-entry sign.

Look-Alike Warning: ね and む

ね (*ne*) and む (*nu*) are the most commonly confused pair in hiragana, because both end in a loop at the bottom right. The reliable test is how they **begin**: **ね starts with a straight vertical line on the left**, whereas **む starts with a slanting stroke**. Watch the stroke-order animations for both and compare the openings. (ね also resembles れ and わ, which you'll meet later in the R and W rows.)

Read It — New Words

With twenty-five characters you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ねこ	neko	cat	<i>ne + ko</i>
2	ねえ	nē	hey, listen	<i>a friendly way to get attention</i>
3	ねっ	netsu	fever	<i>ne + tsu</i>
4	あね	ane	(my) older sister	<i>a + ne; for your own sister</i>
5	かね	kane	money; bell	<i>two meanings, one spelling</i>
6	つの	tsuno	horn	<i>tsu + no</i>
7	いのち	inochi	life	<i>i + no + chi</i>
8	のち	nochi	afterwards, later	<i>a more formal word</i>
9	この	kono	this (+ noun)	<i>ko + no; needs a noun after it</i>
10	その	sono	that (+ noun)	<i>near you</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
11	あの	ano	that over there (+ noun)	<i>far from both</i>
12	あのね	ano ne	you know... / well...	<i>a conversation opener</i>

🔗 The Little Word の — "Of" and "'s"

の joins two nouns, and it works like English "'s" or "of": **A の B** means "A's B". (Spaces are added below to show the word breaks.)

JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH
いぬ の いえ	inu no ie	the dog's house
ねこ の て	neko no te	the cat's paw (hand)
あなた の いぬ	anata no inu	your dog
この ねこ	kono neko	this cat
その いぬ	sono inu	that dog
あの いえ	ano ie	that house over there

Real Japanese Tip — Ending a Sentence with ね

A small ね on the end of a sentence means "..., isn't it?" or "..., right?" and asks the listener to agree. It's one of the most common sounds in Japanese conversation: あつい ね ("It's hot, isn't it?"), おいしい ね ("It's tasty, isn't it?"). Japanese people use it constantly to share a feeling, so using it makes you sound natural and friendly.

🗨️ Mini-Dialogs

① Hot, Isn't It? — あついね

A:

あついね。

atsui ne.

It's hot, isn't it?

B:

ええ、あついね。

ee, atsui ne.

Yes, it's hot, isn't it.

② Whose Cat? — あなたのねこ?

A:

ねえ、このねこ、あなたの？

nē, kono neko, anata no?

Hey, is this cat yours?

B:

ええ、そう！

ee, sō!

Yes, it is!

A:

ちいさいね。

chiisai ne.

It's small, isn't it.

③ A Big Dog — あのいぬ

A:

あのいぬ、おおきい！

ano inu, ookii!

That dog over there is big!

B:

そう？

sō?

Is it?

A:

ええ、おおきいね。

ee, ookii ne.

Yes, it's big, isn't it.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: なに (what?) · あなた (you) · くに (country) · いぬ (dog) · さかな (fish) · にく (meat) · かに (crab) · なつ (summer) · にし (west) · なか (inside) · おなか (stomach) · ない (not).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole N row in order: な に ん ね の

▼ Show answer

na · ni · nu · ne · no

2. How can you tell ね from ん?

▼ Show answer

ね begins with a straight vertical line on the left; ん begins with a slanting stroke. Check the stroke-order animations to see both.

3. Read and translate: ねこ · つの · いのち

▼ Show answer

neko (cat) · tsuno (horn) · inochi (life)

4. Write in hiragana: neko (cat) · anata no inu (your dog) · ano ne (you know...)

▼ Show answer

ねこ · あなたのいぬ · あのね

5. Translate: いぬのいえ · ねこのて

▼ Show answer

the dog's house · the cat's paw (hand)

6. What does ね do at the end of a sentence, as in あつい ね?

▼ Show answer

It means "..., isn't it?" and invites the listener to agree: "It's hot, isn't it?"

Coming Up in Chapter 11

The H row begins: は ひ ふ (ha, hi, fu). Two surprises: *fu* is spelled with an f but sounds softer than the English "f", and the character は is sometimes read as *wa*. You'll then read はな (flower), ひと (person), ふね (ship) and ひこうき (aeroplane).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 11 · Ha Hi Fu

🌸 The H Row Begins — は ひ ふ

The fifth consonant row is **h**, with は (ha), ひ (hi) and ふ (fu). That makes **twenty-eight characters**. Today also brings two very useful discoveries: the word for "yes" (はい), and the fact that は is sometimes read *wa*, which turns it into the most common little word in Japanese sentences.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ

Twenty-eight down, eighteen to go. へ and ほ come in Chapter 12.

✨ Three New Characters — は ひ ふ

は

ha

like "ha" in *hah!* ("hah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a person laughing "*Ha!*"; the tall line is

ひ

hi

like "he" in *heat*, short ("hee")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a big smile, "*hee-heel!*", with the wide curve as the mouth.

ふ

fu

a soft "foo": blow gently with rounded lips, as if cooling soup

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

the body, and the loop is the open mouth.

Memory hook: Mount *Fuji* with wisps of cloud around its peak.

Spelling and Sound: Fu, Not Hu

ふ is written **fu** in romaji, but it isn't the English "f", where the top teeth touch the lower lip. The Japanese sound is made with **both lips**, like blowing out a candle or cooling a spoonful of soup. Try saying "who" with a slightly breathy start and you're close.

Look-Alike Heads-Up: は Joins the け-に Family

は (*ha*) begins with a vertical line on the left, like け and に, but it has a **loop at the bottom**, which け and に don't. In the next chapter you'll also meet ほ (*ho*), which looks like は with an extra bar. Learn the pair as a team: ほ has **two** bars on top, and は has one.

Read It — New Words

With twenty-eight characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	はい	hai	yes	<i>the standard polite "yes"</i>
2	はな	hana	flower; nose	<i>two meanings, one spelling</i>
3	ひと	hito	person	<i>hi + to</i>
4	ふね	fune	ship, boat	<i>fu + ne</i>
5	ひこうき	hikōki	aeroplane	<i>hi-kō-ki: the long "o" is 2 beats</i>
6	はこ	hako	box	<i>ha + ko</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
7	はは	haha	(my) mother	for your own mother, like ちち for father
8	ひとつ	hitotsu	one (thing)	used when counting objects
9	ふたつ	futatsu	two (things)	fu + ta + tsu
10	ひくい	hikui	low, short	the opposite of たかい
11	ふく	fuku	clothes	fu + ku
12	はなし	hanashi	talk, story	ha + na + shi

🔗 The Particle は — Read as "wa"

When は is used as a small grammar word (a **particle**) that marks "what the sentence is about", it is read **wa**, not ha. A **は** B means "As for A, it is B." The character stays は; only the sound changes. (Spaces are added below to show the word breaks.)

JAPANESE	ROMAJI (AS SPOKEN)	ENGLISH
いぬ は おおきい。	inu wa ookii.	The dog is big.
ねこ は ちいさい。	neko wa chiisai.	The cat is small.
さかな は おいしい。	sakana wa oishii.	The fish is delicious.
あなたは？	anata wa ?	And you? (As for you?)

Real Japanese Tip — Why Is は Read "Wa"?

Long ago, the sound written は was pronounced "ha", and in the particle it became "wa" over the centuries, but the old spelling stayed. So there are **three** particles whose spelling and sound differ:

the particle は (read *wa*), the particle へ (read *e*), and the particle を (read *o*). Everywhere else, は is read *ha* (as in はな, はい).

Real Japanese Tip — はい and ええ

Both mean "yes". はい is the standard polite "yes" for formal situations, shops and answering the phone. ええ is a softer, slightly more relaxed "yes". Be careful, though: はい often means "I'm listening / I understand" and not "I agree", so a nodding Japanese listener isn't always saying yes to what you propose. And いいえ is the polite "no".

🗨️ Mini-Dialogs

① Yes, Polite — はい

A:

おいしい？

oishii?

Is it delicious?

B:

はい、おいしい！ あなたは？

hai, oishii! anata wa?

Yes, it's delicious! And you?

A:

おいしいね。

oishii ne.

It's delicious, isn't it.

② Big and Small — おおきい？ ちいさい？

A:

ねこはちいさい。

neko wa chiisai.

The cat is small.

B:

いぬは？

inu wa?

And the dog?

A:

いぬはおおきい。

inu wa ookii.

The dog is big.

③ One or Two? — ひとつ？ ふたつ？

A:

ひとつ？

hitotsu?

One?

B:

いいえ、ふたつ。

iiie, futatsu.

No, two.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: ねこ (cat) · ねえ (hey) · あね (older sister) · かね (money) · いのち (life) · この (this) · その (that) · あの (that over there) · あのね (you know...).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: は · ひ · ふ

▼ Show answer

ha · hi · fu

2. How many strokes do は, ひ and ふ have?

▼ Show answer

は has 3, ひ has 1, ふ has 4.

3. Read and translate: はな · ひと · ふね

▼ Show answer

hana (flower; nose) · hito (person) · fune (ship)

4. Write in hiragana: *hai* (yes) · *hako* (box) · *futatsu* (two things)

▼ Show answer

はい・はこ・ふたつ

5. How is は pronounced in いぬ は おおきい, and what does the sentence mean?

▼ Show answer

As the particle, it is read *wa*: "inu wa ookii", meaning "The dog is big."

6. Which famous mountain does ふ remind you of, and why is it spelled *fu* in romaji?

▼ Show answer

Mount Fuji. The sound is made with both lips (not teeth on lip), so it's written *fu*.

Coming Up in Chapter 12

Two characters finish the H row: へ (he) and ほ (ho). へ is also a particle, read *e*, meaning "to / toward". You'll then read ほし (star),ほか (other), and へ in a sentence.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 12 · He Ho

🌸 Finishing the H Row — へ ほ

Two characters complete the H row: へ (he) and ほ (ho). That makes **thirty characters**. Today you'll meet the second of the three special particles, へ, which is read e and means "to / toward", and you'll be able to build your first sentences with は and へ together.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ

Thirty down, sixteen to go. The M row comes next.

🌟 Two New Characters — へ ほ

he

like "he" in *hen*, short ("heh")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an arrow tip pointing up and to the right, heading off toward a destination.

ho

like "ho" in *hoe*, short and pure ("hoh")

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: Santa's "Ho ho ho!": it's は's "Ha!" with an extra bar, a bigger laugh.

Look-Alike Warnings: ほ and は, へ and く

ほ and は are almost the same character. The difference is **one extra bar**: ほ (*ho*) has **two** short bars at the top, and は (*ha*) has **one**. That's also why ほ has 4 strokes and は has 3. へ and く are both simple angled strokes: へ (*he*) is **wide** and points up, whereas く (*ku*) is **tall and narrow** and points left.

Read It — New Words

With thirty characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	へ	e	to, toward	<i>the particle; read "e"</i>
2	ほし	hoshi	star	<i>ho + shi</i>
3	ほか	hoka	other, else	<i>ho + ka</i>
4	ほね	hone	bone	<i>ho + ne</i>
5	ほお	hō	cheek	<i>a long "o": 2 beats</i>
6	ほしい	hoshii	want, would like	<i>an adjective, "(I) want it"</i>
7	ほそい	hosoi	thin, narrow	<i>an adjective</i>
8	ほとけ	hotoke	Buddha	<i>ho + to + ke</i>
9	へそ	heso	belly button	<i>he + so</i>
10	へた	heta	unskilled, poor at	<i>he + ta</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
11	へい	hei	wall, fence	<i>a garden wall</i>
12	ほう	hō	direction; side	<i>used in comparisons later</i>

The Particle へ — Read as "e"

Just as は is read *wa*, the particle へ is read *e* and means "to / toward": A へ いく = "go to A". The character stays へ; only the reading changes. (Spaces are added to show the word breaks.)

JAPANESE	ROMAJI (AS SPOKEN)	ENGLISH
えき へ いく。	eki e iku.	(I) go to the station.
いえ へ いく。	ie e iku.	(I) go to the house.
そと へ いく。	soto e iku.	(I) go outside.
いぬ は いえ へ いく。	inu wa ie e iku.	The dog goes to the house.
ねこ は そと へ いく。	neko wa soto e iku.	The cat goes outside.

Real Japanese Tip — へ or に?

Japanese people often use に (*ni*) instead of へ with a place and a verb of movement: えき に いく and えき へ いく both mean "go to the station". As a beginner, you can think of へ as "toward" and に as "to / at the exact spot". You'll hear and read both, and nobody will mind which one you pick.

Real Japanese Tip — ほしい, "I Want It"

ほしい (*hoshii*) means "want" and it's very useful to know. A thing you want is "ほしい": ほしい? ("Do you want it?"), はい、ほしい! ("Yes, I want it!"). It's an い-adjective, like おいしい and ちいさい.

🗨️ Mini-Dialogs

① Do You Want It? — ほしい？

A:

ほしい？

hoshii?

Do you want it?

B:

はい、ほしい！

hai, hoshii!

Yes, I want it!

② Where Do They Go? — いく

A:

いぬはいえへいく。

inu wa ie e iku.

The dog goes to the house.

B:

ねこは？

neko wa?

And the cat?

A:

ねこはそとへいく。

neko wa soto e iku.

The cat goes outside.

③ To the Station — えきへ

A:

ねえ、えきへいく？

nē, eki e iku?

Hey, are you going to the station?

B:

はい、いく！

hai, iku!

Yes, I'm going!

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: はい (yes) · はな (flower; nose) · ひと (person) · ふね (ship) · ひこうき (aeroplane) · はこ (box) · はは (mother) · ひとつ (one thing) ·

ふたつ (two things) · ひくい (low) · ふく (clothes) · はなし (talk).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole H row in order: は ひ ふ へ ほ

▼ Show answer

ha · hi · fu · he · ho

2. How can you tell ほ from は?

▼ Show answer

ほ has two short bars at the top (4 strokes); は has one (3 strokes).

3. Read and translate: ほし · ほね · へそ

▼ Show answer

hoshi (star) · hone (bone) · heso (belly button)

4. Write in hiragana: *hoshii* (want) · *hoka* (other) · *heta* (unskilled)

▼ Show answer

ほしい · ほか · へた

5. Read and translate: いぬ は いえ へ いく。

▼ Show answer

"inu wa ie e iku": The dog goes to the house. (は is read *wa* and へ is read *e*.)

6. How is へ pronounced when it's used as a particle, and what does it mean?

▼ Show answer

It's read *e*, and it means "to / toward".

Coming Up in Chapter 13

The M row begins: ま み む (ma, mi, mu). You'll then read うま (horse), みみ (ear), むし (insect) and まち (town). One more particle is waiting for the end of the course: を.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 13 · Ma Mi Mu

🌸 The M Row Begins — ま み む

The sixth consonant row is **m**, with ま (ma), み (mi) and む (mu). That makes **thirty-three characters**. With ま and す you can also write the polite verb ending **ます** for the first time, so today you'll read your first polite sentences.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m +	ま	み	む	め	も

Thirty-three down, thirteen to go. め and も come in Chapter 14.

✨ Three New Characters — ま み む

ま

ma

like "ma" in *mama*, short
("mah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

み

mi

like "mee" in *meet*, short
("mee")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

む

mu

like "moo" in *moon*, with
relaxed lips

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *mama* with two arms out, holding a little bundle (the loop) at her feet.

Memory hook: a squiggly musical note: do-re-*mi*.

Memory hook: a cow going "*moo!*", with its tail curling up at the right.

Look-Alike Warnings: ま and ほ, む and す

ま and ほ: both have two bars and a loop, but ほ has a **vertical line on the left** (and 4 strokes), while ま doesn't (3 strokes). **む and す:** they share the same bar-and-loop shape, but む has an **extra small stroke** at the right: む has 3 strokes, and す has 2. Check the count when you read or write them.

Read It — New Words

With thirty-three characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	うま	uma	horse	<i>u + ma</i>
2	みみ	mimi	ear	<i>mi + mi</i>
3	むし	mushi	insect, bug	<i>mu + shi</i>
4	まち	machi	town, city	<i>ma + chi</i>
5	みち	michi	road, way	<i>mi + chi</i>
6	みせ	mise	shop	<i>mi + se</i>
7	まえ	mae	front; before	<i>ma + e</i>
8	うみ	umi	sea	<i>u + mi</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
9	きた	kita	north	<i>ki + ta</i>
10	みなみ	minami	south	<i>mi + na + mi</i>
11	むかし	mukashi	long ago	<i>mu + ka + shi</i>
12	まつ	matsu	to wait	<i>a verb in dictionary form</i>

Real Japanese Tip — The Compass

You now know three of the four compass points: **きた** (north), **みなみ** (south) and **にし** (west, Chapter 9). The fourth, **ひがし** (east), needs **が**, which comes with the voiced sounds in the next course.

Your First Polite Verbs — えます

The ending **ます** (-masu) makes a verb **polite**, the style you use with people you don't know well, shopkeepers and teachers. To make it, change the final -u sound of the dictionary form to its -i sound, then add **ます**.

DICTIONARY FORM	POLITE FORM	ROMAJI	ENGLISH
いく	いきます	ikimasu	go
かう	かいます	kaimasu	buy
きく	ききます	kikimasu	listen, ask
かく	かきます	kakimasu	write
あう	あいます	aimasu	meet

まつ

まちます

machimasu

wait

Notice the Change: く → き, う → い, つ → ち

Each dictionary form ends in a *u*-row character (く, う, つ) and, in the polite form, it moves to the *i* position of the same row: く → き (*ku* → *ki*), う → い (*u* → *i*), つ → ち (*tsu* → *chi*). That's the chart doing real work: now you can see why the rows are worth learning in order. (This pattern works for the large group of "u-verbs" like these; the other group of verbs forms ます differently, and you'll meet it in the conversation courses.) Add か to the end to ask a question: いきますか? ("Do you go?").

 Mini-Dialogs

① To the Station — えきへ いきますか？

A:

えきへ いきますか？

eki e ikimasu ka?

Are you going to the station?

B:

はい、いきます。

hai, ikimasu.

Yes, I'm going.

② To the Sea — うみへ

A:

うみへ いきます。

umi e ikimasu.

I'm going to the sea.

B:

いつ？

itsu?

When?

A:

ことし。

kotoshi.

This year.

③ Will You Wait? — まちますか？

A:

まちますか？

machimasu ka?

Will you wait?

B:

はい、まちます。

hai, machimasu.

Yes, I'll wait.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: ほし (star) · ほか (other) · ほね (bone) · ほしい (want) · ほそい (thin) · へそ (belly button) · へた (unskilled) · いえへいく (go to the house).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: ま · み · む

▼ Show answer

ma · mi · mu

2. How many strokes do ま, み and む have, and how can you tell ま from ほ?

▼ Show answer

ま has 3, み has 2, む has 3. ほ has a vertical line on the left (4 strokes); ま doesn't.

3. Read and translate: うま · みみ · むし

▼ Show answer

uma (horse) · mimi (ear) · mushi (insect)

4. Write in hiragana: *mise* (shop) · *umi* (sea) · *machi* (town)

▼ Show answer

みせ · うみ · まち

5. Make these verbs polite: いく · かく · まつ

▼ Show answer

いきます (*ikimasu*) · かきます (*kakimasu*) · まちます (*machimasu*)

6. Read and translate: えき へ いきます。

▼ Show answer

"eki e ikimasu": I go to the station.

Coming Up in Chapter 14

Two characters finish the M row: め (me) and も (mo). You'll then read あめ (rain), かめ (turtle), もも (peach) and もの (thing). Remember the warning about め: it looks very like ん, so you'll compare the two side by side.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 14 · Me Mo

🌸 Finishing the M Row — め も

Two characters complete the M row: め (me) and も (mo). That makes **thirty-five characters**.

Today you'll also meet the particle も ("also, too"), the phone greeting もしもし, and the words for the people in your family.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m +	ま	み	む	め	も

Thirty-five down, eleven to go. The Y row comes next.

✨ Two New Characters — め も

め

me

like "me" in *met*, short ("meh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

も

mo

like "mo" in *more*, short and pure ("moh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an eye with a long lash flicking out to the right. (め is also the Japanese word for "eye".)

Memory hook: a fishing hook with two lines in the water: more fish!

Look-Alike Warning: め and ぬ

め (*me*) and ぬ (*nu*) are the classic mix-up from Chapter 9. Both are 2 strokes with a slanting first stroke, and both finish at the bottom right, but **ぬ ends in a small loop, while め ends in a plain sweep** with no loop. Compare them side by side: ぬ め. Remember "ぬ for noodles" (the tangle) and "め for eye" (the open lash).

Read It — New Words

With thirty-five characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	め	me	eye	<i>a word as well as a character</i>
2	あめ	ame	rain; candy	<i>same spelling, different pitch</i>
3	かめ	kame	turtle	<i>ka + me</i>
4	もも	momo	peach	<i>mo + mo</i>
5	もの	mono	thing, object	<i>a physical "thing"</i>
6	もち	mochi	rice cake	<i>mo + chi</i>
7	くも	kumo	cloud; spider	<i>two meanings, one spelling</i>
8	もう	mō	already; any more	<i>"mo-o": 2 beats</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
9	おもい	omoi	heavy	<i>an adjective</i>
10	おもう	omou	to think	<i>a verb</i>
11	いもうと	imōto	(my) younger sister	<i>four beats: i-mo-u-to</i>
12	もしもし	moshi moshi	hello (on the phone)	<i>how you answer a call</i>

Real Japanese Tip — あめ: Rain and Candy

あめ means both "rain" and "candy". They're written the same in hiragana, but a Japanese speaker tells them apart by **pitch** (the rise and fall of the voice), and by context. That's one reason Japanese writers often use kanji, which separate the meanings. For now, context is all you need.

Real Japanese Tip — Your Own Family

You now know the casual, humble words that people use for **their own** family: ちち (father), はは (mother), あに (older brother), あね (older sister), おとうと (younger brother) and いもうと (younger sister). When talking about someone else's family, Japanese uses different, more respectful words, which you'll meet in the conversation courses.

🔗 The Particle も — "Also, Too"

The particle も (mo) means "also" or "too". It takes the place of は: **A も B** = "A is B too". (Spaces are added to show the word breaks.)

JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH
いぬはちいさい。ねこもちいさい。	inu wa chiisai. neko mo chiisai.	The dog is small. The cat is small too.

JAPANESE

ROMAJI

ENGLISH

あなたも？

anata mo?

You too?

えきへいきます。あなたも？

eki e ikimasu.
anata mo?

I'm going to the
station. Are you
going too?



Mini-Dialogs

① On the Phone — もしもし

A:

もしもし。

moshi moshi.

Hello? (answering the phone)

B:

もしもし。あのね、...

moshi moshi. ano ne, ...

Hello. You know, ...

② Small Too — ねこも

A:

いぬはちいさい。

inu wa chiisai.

The dog is small.

B:

ねこもちいさいね。

neko mo chiisai ne.

The cat is small too, isn't it.

③ You Too? — あなたも？

A:

えきへいきます。あなたも？

eki e ikimasu. anata mo?

I'm going to the station. You too?

B:

はい、いきます。

hai, ikimasu.

Yes, I'm going.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: うま (horse) · みみ (ear) · むし (insect) · まち (town) · みち (road) · みせ (shop) · まえ (front) · うみ (sea) · きた (north) · みなみ (south) · むかし (long ago) · まつ (to wait).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole M row in order: ま み む め も

▼ Show answer

ma · mi · mu · me · mo

2. How can you tell め from む, and how many strokes do め and も have?

▼ Show answer

む ends in a small loop; め ends in a plain sweep. め has 2 strokes, も has 3.

3. Read and translate: あめ · かめ · もも

▼ Show answer

ame (rain, or candy) · kame (turtle) · momo (peach)

4. Write in hiragana: *mono* (thing) · *kumo* (cloud) · *imōto* (younger sister)

▼ Show answer

もの · くも · いもうと

5. Translate: ねこ も ちいさい。 and あなた も？

▼ Show answer

The cat is small too. ・ You too?

6. What do you say when you answer a phone call in Japanese?

▼ Show answer

もしもし (moshi moshi).

Coming Up in Chapter 15

The Y row begins: や ゆ よ (ya, yu, yo). The Y row has only three characters (the "yi" and "ye" slots are empty). You'll then read やま (mountain), ゆぎ (snow), ゆめ (dream), やさい (vegetables) and やすみ (holiday).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 15 · Ya Yu Yo

🌸 The Y Row — や ゆ よ

The Y row has only **three** characters: や (ya), ゆ (yu) and よ (yo). The "yi" and "ye" slots on the chart are empty, because Japanese doesn't use those sounds. That brings you to **thirty-eight characters**, with just eight left to learn.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m +	ま	み	む	め	も
y +	や		ゆ		よ

Thirty-eight down, eight to go: the R row, わ, を and ん.

✨ Three New Characters — や ゆ よ

や

ya

like "ya" in *yard*, short ("yah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

ゆ

yu

like "you", short ("yoo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

よ

yo

like "yo" in *yo-yo*, short and pure ("yoh")

Memory hook: a yacht with a tall mast and a sail, heading off to the right.

Memory hook: a U-shaped hot bath with a fish swimming through it. (湯 is also the word for "hot water".)

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a yo-yo hanging from its string.

Look-Alike Warning: よ and ま

よ (*yo*) and ま (*ma*) share a vertical stem that ends in a loop. The test is the bars: ま **has two horizontal bars** (3 strokes), whereas よ **has just one short bar** at the top left (2 strokes). Count the bars each time.

Read It — New Words

With thirty-eight characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	やま	yama	mountain	<i>ya + ma</i>
2	ゆき	yuki	snow	<i>yu + ki</i>
3	ゆめ	yume	dream	<i>yu + me</i>
4	やさい	yasai	vegetables	<i>ya + sa + i</i>
5	やすみ	yasumi	holiday; a rest; a day off	<i>ya + su + mi</i>
6	やすい	yasui	cheap	<i>the opposite of たいがい (expensive)</i>
7	よこ	yoko	side; beside	<i>yo + ko</i>
8	よむ	yomu	to read	<i>a verb: the one this course is training you for</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
9	よく	yoku	often; well	<i>an adverb</i>
10	よい	yoi	good	<i>a slightly formal alternative to いい</i>
11	ゆか	yuka	floor	<i>yu + ka</i>
12	ゆうめい	yūmei	famous	<i>four beats: yu-u-me-i</i>

Real Japanese Tip — ゆ on the Bathhouse Curtain

ゆ is the word for "hot water", and the single character ゆ hangs on the curtain (*noren*) outside traditional public bathhouses (*sentō*), so a person who reads nothing else can still find a hot bath. It's the first character in this course that you're likely to see standing alone on a real sign.

A Peek Ahead — Small や, ゆ, よ

Later in Hiragana 3, you'll meet **small** versions of these three characters, written や ゆ よ. They join the character before them to make a single combined sound, as in きゃ (*kya*), きゅ (*kyu*) and きょ (*kyo*). For now, just read each full-size や, ゆ or よ as its own sound.

More Polite Verbs — From む to み

Remember the pattern from Chapter 13: the final u-row character changes to its i-row partner and takes ます. Today's verb よむ shows the M row doing the same: む → み.

DICTIONARY FORM	POLITE FORM	ROMAJI	ENGLISH
よむ	よみます	yomimasu	read
いく	いきます	ikimasu	go
まつ	待ちます	machimasu	wait



Mini-Dialogs

① Cheap? — やすい？

A:

たかい？

takai?

Is it expensive?

B:

いいえ、やすい！

iiē, yasui!

No, it's cheap!

② To the Mountain — やまへ

A:

やまへいきますか？

yama e ikimasu ka?

Are you going to the mountain?

B:

はい、いきます。ゆき、おおい
ね。

hai, ikimasu. yuki, ooi ne.

Yes. There's a lot of snow, isn't there.

A:

そうね。

sō ne.

Yes, there is.

③ Often — よく

A:

よくいきますか？

yoku ikimasu ka?

Do you go there often?

B:

はい、よくいきます。

hai, yoku ikimasu.

Yes, I go often.

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: め (eye) · あめ (rain) · かめ (turtle) · もも (peach) ·
もの (thing) · もち (rice cake) · くも (cloud) · もう (already) · おもい (heavy) · おも

う (to think) · いもうと (younger sister).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: や · ゆ · よ

▼ Show answer

ya · yu · yo

2. How many strokes do や, ゆ and よ have, and how can you tell よ from ま?

▼ Show answer

や has 3, ゆ has 2, よ has 2. ま has two horizontal bars; よ has only one short bar.

3. Read and translate: やま · ゆき · ゆめ

▼ Show answer

yama (mountain) · yuki (snow) · yume (dream)

4. Write in hiragana: yasui (cheap) · yomu (to read) · yūmei (famous)

▼ Show answer

やすい · よむ · ゆうめい

5. Make よむ polite.

▼ Show answer

よみます (yomimasu): む changes to み, then add ます.

6. What does a single ゆ on a curtain outside a building mean?

▼ Show answer

"Hot water": it marks a public bathhouse (*sentō*).

Coming Up in Chapter 16

The R row begins: ら り る (ra, ri, ru). The Japanese "r" is neither an English "r" nor an "l": it's a quick tap of the tongue, a bit like the "d" in "ladder". You'll then read さくら (cherry blossom), くるま (car), そら (sky) and りす (squirrel).

Hiragana 1

Chapter 16 · Ra Ri Ru

🌸 The R Row Begins — ら り る

The last big consonant row is **r**, with ら (ra), り (ri) and る (ru). That makes **forty-one characters**, and today you can read the words for cherry blossom, car, bird, and the two key verbs ある and いる ("to exist").

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m +	ま	み	む	め	も
y +	や		ゆ		よ
r +	ら	り	る	れ	ろ

Forty-one down, five to go: れ, ろ, わ, を and ん.

🌟 The Japanese "R" — A Tap of the Tongue

The Japanese "r" is neither an English "r" nor an "l". It's a **quick tap** of the tip of the tongue against the ridge behind your upper teeth, like the "d" in ladder or the "tt" in American butter. (Many Scottish speakers already make a similar tap in very.) Say "ladder" quickly and listen for that tap: that is the sound in ra, ri, ru, re and ro. Don't curl your tongue back like an English "r".

✨ Three New Characters — ら り る

ら

ra

a tapped "r" + "ah", like "la" in *lava*, but quicker ("rah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *rabbit*, with a short ear on top and a curved back.

り

ri

a tapped "r" + "ee", like "ree" in *reed*, but quicker ("ree")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: two *reeds* growing side by side, one shorter than the other.

る

ru

a tapped "r" + "oo", like "roo" in *kangaroo*, but quicker ("roo")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *kangaroo* curled up, with its pouch (the loop) at the bottom.

Look-Alike Warnings: り and い, ら and ち, る and ろ

り and い: in い (*i*), the **left** stroke is the tall one, and in り (*ri*) the **right** stroke is the long one. **ら and ち:** both have 2 strokes, but ら starts with a short slanting dash, and ち starts with a horizontal bar. **る and ろ:** ろ (*ro*) is next chapter's character, and it looks just like る but **without the loop** at the bottom, so watch for the loop.

📖 Read It — New Words

With forty-one characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	さくら	sakura	cherry blossom	<i>sa + ku + ra</i>
2	くるま	kuruma	car	<i>ku + ru + ma</i>
3	そら	sora	sky	<i>so + ra</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
4	りす	risu	squirrel	<i>ri + su</i>
5	とり	tori	bird	<i>to + ri</i>
6	さら	sara	plate, dish	<i>sa + ra</i>
7	ある	aru	to exist, to be (things)	<i>for objects that don't move</i>
8	いる	iru	to be, to exist (people, animals)	<i>for living things</i>
9	みる	miru	to see, to watch	<i>a verb</i>
10	のる	noru	to ride, to get on	<i>a verb</i>
11	つくる	tsukuru	to make	<i>a verb</i>
12	かえる	kaeru	to return, to go home	<i>also means "frog"</i>

Real Japanese Tip — ある and いる, Two Words for "To Be There"

Japanese uses **two** verbs for "exist", depending on what exists. **いる** is for **living things that move** (people and animals): **ねこ が いる** (there is a cat). **ある** is for **things** (objects, plants, events): **さら が ある** (there is a plate). You'll hear both constantly, so it's worth learning the pair now. (The small **が**, which marks the subject, comes in the next course.)

Real Japanese Tip — さくら and Hanami

さくら (cherry blossom) is the most famous flower in Japan. Each spring, people gather under the trees for **はなみ** (*hanami*, "flower viewing"): picnics beneath the blossom, usually in late March and early April. You can already read **さくら**, **はな** (flower) and **みる** (to see), so you have the three words you need for it.



Polite Verbs Ending in る — Two Groups

Verbs ending in る come in two groups, and they make the polite form differently. In the first group, you **drop** る and add ます. In the second, you change る → り and then add ます. For now, learn these as vocabulary; the conversation courses will explain how to tell the groups apart.

DICTIONARY FORM	POLITE FORM	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	HOW
みる	みます	mimasu	see, watch	drop る
いる	います	imasu	be (living things)	drop る
ある	あります	arimasu	be (things)	る → り
のる	のります	norimasu	ride	る → り
つくる	つくります	tsukurimasu	make	る → り
かえる	かえります	kaerimasu	return, go home	る → り



Mini-Dialogs

① Is the Cat There? — ねこ、いますか？

A:

ねこ、いますか？

neko, imasu ka?

Is the cat there?

B:

はい、います。

hai, imasu.

Yes, it is.

② A Plate — さら、ある？

A:

さら、ある？

sara, aru?

Do we have a plate?

B:

ええ、ある。

ee, aru.

Yes, we do.

A:

ちいさい？

chiisai?

Is it small?

③ Cherry Blossoms — さくら

A:

さくら、みますか？

sakura, mimasu ka?

Will you see the cherry blossoms?

B:

はい、みます！

hai, mimasu!

Yes, I will!

A:

いつ？

itsu?

When?

B:

ことし！

kotoshi!

This year!

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: やま (mountain) · ゆき (snow) · ゆめ (dream) · や
さい (vegetables) · やすみ (holiday) · やすい (cheap) · よこ (side) · よむ (to read) ·
よく (often) · ゆうめい (famous).



Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: ら・り・る

▼ Show answer

ra · ri · ru

2. How many strokes do ら, り and る have, and how do you pronounce the Japanese "r"?

▼ Show answer

ら has 2, り has 2, る has 1. The "r" is a quick tap of the tongue, like the "d" in *ladder*.

3. Read and translate: さくら・くるま・そら

▼ Show answer

sakura (cherry blossom) · kuruma (car) · sora (sky)

4. Write in hiragana: risu (squirrel) · tori (bird) · sara (plate)

▼ Show answer

りす・とり・さら

5. Which verb would you use for "there is a cat", and which for "there is a plate"?

▼ Show answer

A cat is a living thing: いる (iru). A plate is an object: ある (aru).

6. Make these polite: みる・ある・のる

▼ Show answer

みます (drop る) · あります (る → り) · のります (る → り)

Coming Up in Chapter 17

Two characters finish the R row: れ (re) and ろ (ro). You'll then read これ (this), それ (that), あれ (that over there), ろく (six) and くろ (black), which completes the "this / that" word family.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 17 · Re Ro

🌸 Finishing the R Row — れ ろ

Two characters complete the R row: れ (re) and ろ (ro). That makes **forty-three characters**, with only three left. Today completes the "this / that" word family (これ, それ, あれ), gives you the colours, and lets you read most of the numbers from 1 to 10.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m +	ま	み	む	め	も
y +	や		ゆ		よ
r +	ら	り	る	れ	ろ

Forty-three down, three to go: わ, を and ん.

🌟 Two New Characters — れ ろ

れ

re

ろ

ro

a tapped "r" + "eh", like "re" in *rest*, but quicker ("reh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a *re*scue worker with a long cape streaming out behind.

a tapped "r" + "oh", like "ro" in *road*, but quicker ("roh")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a winding *ro*ad, twisting twice on its way up the hill.

Look-Alike Warnings: る and ろ, and the れ-ね-わ Cousins

る and ろ are the same shape, except る **has a loop** at the bottom (the kangaroo's pouch) and ろ **doesn't**. Check the loop every time. れ, ね and わ are three cousins that all start with a vertical line on the left. ね **ends in a loop**, whereas れ **ends in an open sweep**, and わ (next chapter) is a rounder cousin. We'll compare れ and わ side by side in Chapter 18.

Read It — New Words

With forty-three characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	これ	kore	this (thing)	<i>near me</i>
2	それ	sore	that (thing)	<i>near you</i>
3	あれ	are	that over there	<i>far from both; also "Huh?"</i>
4	ろく	roku	six (6)	<i>ro + ku</i>
5	れい	rei	zero (0)	<i>re + i</i>
6	いろ	iro	colour	<i>i + ro</i>
7	くろ	kuro	black	<i>ku + ro</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
8	しろ	shiro	white	<i>shi + ro</i>
9	きいろ	kiiro	yellow	<i>three beats: ki-i-ro</i>
10	ひろい	hiroi	wide, spacious	<i>an adjective</i>
11	ふるい	furui	old (not for people)	<i>an adjective</i>
12	それから	sore kara	and then, after that	<i>so + re + ka + ra</i>

Colours — いろ

You can now read five colours. Add **い** to turn a colour into an adjective that describes something: あか → あかい ("red").

COLOUR (NOUN)	ROMAJI	ADJECTIVE	ENGLISH
あか	aka	あかい	red
あお	ao	あおい	blue
くろ	kuro	くろい	black
しろ	shiro	しろい	white
きいろ	kiiro	きいろい	yellow

Numbers You Can Read Now

Most of the numbers from 0 to 9 are written with characters you now know. Only 3, 5 and 10 are missing: they need ん, ご (a voiced sound) and a combined sound, which come later.

NUMBER	HIRAGANA	ROMAJI	NOTE
0	れい	rei	also れ〇 in katakana
1	いち	ichi	Chapter 7
2	に	ni	just the one character
4	し	shi	often said yon (よん) instead
6	ろく	roku	new today
7	なな / しち	nana / shichi	two readings
8	はち	hachi	ha + chi
9	く	ku	often said kyū (きゅう) instead

Real Japanese Tip — Unlucky Numbers: 4 and 9

The number 4 (し) sounds like the word for "death" (死), and 9 (く) can sound like "suffering" (苦), so Japanese speakers often avoid them. They say よん for 4 and きゅう for 9 instead. Some hospitals and apartment blocks even skip the 4th floor, and gift sets often come in threes and fives rather than fours.

Real Japanese Tip — それから and これから

それから (sore kara) means "and then, after that", and it's the connector you'll use to tell a story in order. Its partner これから (kore kara) means "from now on" or "after this". You can read both already.



Mini-Dialogs

① Is This a Cat? — これは？

A:

これはねこ？

kore wa neko?

Is this a cat?

B:

いいえ、いぬ。

iiē, inu.

No, a dog.

A:

そうか。

sō ka.

I see.

② Where's the Plate? — あれ？

A:

あれ？ さら、ない！

are? sara, nai!

Huh? The plate isn't here!

B:

そこにある。

soko ni aru.

It's there.

③ A White Dog — しろい いぬ

A:

あの いぬ、しろい ね。

ano inu, shiroi ne.

That dog over there is white, isn't it.

B:

ええ、しろい ね！

ee, shiroi ne!

Yes, it's white!

Review: Reading Back

Cover the English and read these again: さくら (cherry blossom) ・ くるま (car) ・ そら (sky) ・ りす (squirrel) ・ とり (bird) ・ さら (plate) ・ ある (to be there) ・ いる (to be there,

alive) · **みる** (to see) · **のる** (to ride) · **つくる** (to make) · **かえる** (to return).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Say the whole R row in order: ら り る れ ろ

▼ Show answer

ra · ri · ru · re · ro

2. How many strokes do れ and ろ have, and how can you tell ろ from る?

▼ Show answer

れ has 2, ろ has 1. る has a loop at the bottom; ろ doesn't.

3. Read and translate: これ · それ · あれ

▼ Show answer

kore (this, near me) · sore (that, near you) · are (that over there)

4. Write in hiragana: kuro (black) · shiro (white) · kiiro (yellow)

▼ Show answer

くろ · しろ · きいろ

5. Read these numbers: ろく · なな · はち · and write "2" in hiragana.

▼ Show answer

6 · 7 · 8, and 2 is に.

6. What does それから mean?

▼ Show answer

"And then" or "after that".

Coming Up in Chapter 18

The last chapter: わ (wa), を (wo / o) and ん (n). You'll finish with わたし (I), にほん (Japan), こんにちは (hello), さようなら (goodbye) and おはよう (good morning), plus the third particle, を, and a "Course Complete" summary.

Hiragana 1

Chapter 18 · Wa Wo N

🌸 The Last Three — わをん

The final three basic characters are **わ** (wa), **を** (wo, said "o") and **ん** (n). With them you've learned all 46 basic hiragana. Today you'll also meet the third particle, **を**, and you'll be able to read the everyday greetings that every learner wants first.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	あ	い	う	え	お
k +	か	き	く	け	こ
s +	さ	し	す	せ	そ
t +	た	ち	つ	て	と
n +	な	に	ぬ	ね	の
h +	は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
m +	ま	み	む	め	も
y +	や		ゆ		よ
r +	ら	り	る	れ	ろ
w +	わ				を
n	ん				

All 46 basic characters, complete. The empty cells are sounds Japanese doesn't use.

✨ Three New Characters — わをん

わ

wa

like "wa" in *wash* (short),
"wah"

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a rolling *wave*,
curling over at the bottom.

を

wo (o)

said exactly like お, "oh"

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a person
leaning forward and handing
you a parcel, because を marks
the thing being handed over.

ん

n

a full beat of "n", as in *pen*

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: it looks a bit
like a slanting "h", but it says *n*.
Think of "n" with a long curling
tail.

Look-Alike Warning: わ, れ and ね

These three are cousins that share a vertical stroke on the left. ね ends in a loop, れ ends in an open sweep that flicks outward, and わ has a rounder base that curls back up and doesn't flick. Compare

わ れ ね side by side, and use the stroke-order animations to see how each one ends.

ん Is a Whole Beat

ん is the only kana that isn't a vowel or a consonant + vowel: it's a **nasal "n"** that takes a full beat of its own, like a syllable. So ほん ("book") has two beats, *ho-n*, and こんにちは has five. It never starts a word. In real speech it changes slightly depending on the sound after it (it can sound like "m" or "ng"), but you can safely say a clear "n" at this stage.



Read It — New Words

With all 46 characters, you can read all of these. Remember that each character is one beat.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	わたし	watashi	I, me	<i>wa + ta + shi</i>
2	にほん	nihon	Japan	<i>ni + ho + n</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
3	ほん	hon	book	<i>ho + n: two beats</i>
4	せんせい	sensei	teacher	<i>se-n-se-i: four beats</i>
5	わかる	wakaru	to understand	<i>a very useful verb</i>
6	わるい	warui	bad	<i>the opposite of いい</i>
7	かわ	kawa	river	<i>ka + wa</i>
8	わに	wani	crocodile	<i>wa + ni</i>
9	わらう	warau	to laugh	<i>a verb</i>
10	みかん	mikan	mandarin orange	<i>mi-ka-n: three beats</i>
11	うん	un	yeah (casual)	<i>a casual "yes"</i>
12	ほんとう	hontō	really, true	<i>ほんとう? = "Really?"</i>

🔗 The Particle を — "The Thing Being Acted On"

The third particle, を, marks the **object** of a verb: the thing you read, buy, see or make. A を **verb** = "(do the verb) to A". It's read o, exactly like お, and it's only ever used as a particle. (Spaces are added to show the word breaks.)

JAPANESE	ROMAJI (AS SPOKEN)	ENGLISH
ほん を よみます。	hon o yomimasu.	I read a book.
さかな を かいます。	sakana o kaimasu.	I buy fish.

JAPANESE	ROMAJI (AS SPOKEN)	ENGLISH
さくらをみます。	sakura o mimasu.	I look at the cherry blossoms.
くるまをつくります。	kuruma o tsukurimasu.	I make a car.

The Three Particles That Change Their Sound

You've now met all three: は is read *wa* (Chapter 11), へ is read *e* (Chapter 12), and を is read *o* (today). Everywhere else, these characters are read normally. Together with の, も, に and か, which you already know, you can read the grammar skeleton of a Japanese sentence.

Greetings You Can Read — あいさつ

JAPANESE	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	WHEN
おはよう	ohayō	good morning	<i>in the morning (casual)</i>
こんにちは	konnichiwa	hello; good afternoon	<i>は is read wa here</i>
さようなら	sayōnara	goodbye	<i>a fairly final goodbye</i>
またね	mata ne	see you!	<i>casual, with friends</i>
おやすみなさい	oyasumi nasai	good night	<i>before bed (おやすみ is casual)</i>
すみません	sumimasen	excuse me; sorry	<i>to get attention or to apologise</i>
よろしく	yoroshiku	nice to meet you (short form)	<i>often with おねがいします later</i>

Real Japanese Tip — Why "Konnichiwa" Ends in は

こんにちは is read *konnichi wa*, and the final **は** is the particle you learned in Chapter 11, read *wa*. It began life as part of a longer greeting ("as for today, ..."), which is why the old spelling survived. The same thing happens in **こんばんは** ("good evening"), which you'll be able to read in the next course.

🗨️ Mini-Dialogs

① Good Morning — おはよう

A:

おはよう！
ohayō!
Good morning!

B:

おはよう。
ohayō.
Good morning.

A:

またね。
mata ne.
See you.

② Excuse Me, Teacher — すみません

A:

すみません、せんせい。これ、なに？
sumimasen, sensei. kore, nani?
Excuse me, teacher. What is this?

B:

それはほん。
sore wa hon.
That is a book.

③ Really? — ほんとう？

A:

さくらをみますか？
sakura o mimasu ka?
Will you see the cherry blossoms?

B:

はい、にほんへいきます。
hai, nihon e ikimasu.
Yes, I'm going to Japan.

A:

ほんとう？
hontō?

Really?

B:

ええ、ほんとう！

ee, hontō!

Yes, really!

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Read these aloud: わ・を・ん

▼ Show answer

wa・o (written wo)・n

2. How many strokes do わ, を and ん have?

▼ Show answer

わ has 2, を has 3, ん has 1.

3. Read and translate: わたし・にほん・せんせい

▼ Show answer

watashi (I)・nihon (Japan)・sensei (teacher)

4. Write in hiragana: *hon* (book)・*kawa* (river)・*mikan* (mandarin)

▼ Show answer

ほん・かわ・みかん

5. Read and translate: ほんをよみます。 How is を pronounced?

▼ Show answer

"hon o yomimasu": I read a book. を is read o.

6. What do you say to greet someone in the morning, and what do you say to get a stranger's attention politely?

▼ Show answer

おはよう (ohayō) in the morning; すみません (sumimasen) to say "excuse me".

❖ Final Challenge — Read a Whole Paragraph

You can now read this short passage in full. Read it aloud, then check the meaning.

わたしは にほん へ いきます。

さくら を みます。

それから、すし を かいます。

▶ Show romaji and meaning

🎉 Course Complete — あなたができること

You've finished Hiragana 1. You can now read and write all 46 basic hiragana. Here is the journey:

CHAPTERS	YOU LEARNED...
1-2 · Vowels	How Japanese writing works, and あいうえお.
3-4 · K row	か き く け こ, the softer Japanese k, and your first verbs.
5-6 · S row	さ し す せ そ, and the "shi" spelling; こ-そ-あ place words.
7-8 · T row	た ち つ て と, "chi" and "tsu", and your first mini-dialogs.
9-10 · N row	な に ぬ ね の, the possessive の, and ね at the end of a sentence.

CHAPTERS**YOU LEARNED...**

11–12 · H row	は ひ ふ へ ほ, and the particles は (wa) and へ (e).
13–14 · M row	ま み む め も, polite ます verbs, and the particle も.
15 · Y row	や ゆ よ, cheap and expensive, and reading with よむ.
16–17 · R row	ら り る れ ろ, the tapped r, ある and いる, colours and numbers.
18 · W and N	わ を ん, the particle を, and the everyday greetings.

In total that's around 200 words, seven little grammar words (は, へ, を, の, も, に, か), the polite ます ending, and the confidence to read short real sentences. Well done: よくできました! (yoku dekimashita, "well done").

What Comes Next — Hiragana 2

The next course, **Hiragana 2**, adds the marks that change sounds: the two small strokes ° (*dakuten*), which turn か into が, さ into ざ, た into だ and は into ば, and the small circle ° (*handakuten*), which turns は into ぱ. After that come the combined sounds (きゃ, しゅ, ちょ), the small っ and long vowels. Those unlock words like ありがとう ("thank you"), ごはん ("rice, meal") and ひがし ("east"). Keep reviewing the chart from this course out loud every day, and がんばって! ("good luck, keep it up!").