

JP

HIRAGANA

Hiragana 1 · Chapter 11 · Ha Hi Fu

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🌸 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-hee!*", 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 うち 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。

iie, 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.