

JP

HIRAGANA

Hiragana 1 · Chapter 16 · Ra Ri Ru

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🌸 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 黒 (black), which completes the "this / that" word family.