

JP

HIRAGANA

Hiragana 1 · Chapter 3 · Ka Ki Ku

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🌸 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).