

JP

HIRAGANA

Hiragana 1 · Chapter 5 · Sa Shi Su

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🌸 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).