

JP

HIRAGANA

Hiragana 3 · Chapter 1 · Small Tsu

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🌸 Small つ — The Silent Beat

Hiragana 1 gave you the 46 basic characters, and Hiragana 2 added the voiced ones. Hiragana 3 completes the set with the three things left: the **small つ** (today), **long vowels**, and the **combined sounds** such as きゃ and しゅ. Let's start with the smallest character of all. Romaji is shown for everything.

🔊 What Small つ Does — 促音

The small つ (sokuon) is the same shape as つ but written about half the size, low and to the right. It has no sound of its own. It means: **pause for one beat, then say the next consonant again**. In romaji, it shows up as a doubled consonant.

(pause)

a silent beat: hold your mouth shut for one beat, then release the next consonant

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a つ that has been squashed to half size, like a tiny clenched fist before a punch. It's a full beat, so きっぷ has three beats.

Count the Beats

きっぷ (ticket) has **three** beats: *ki* · (pause) · *pu*. In English you would say it as two syllables, "kip-pu", with no gap. In Japanese, the middle beat is real: tap the table three times as you say it. The pause happens with your mouth closed on the consonant: for きっぷ your lips close for *p* and stay shut for one beat, then open.

Short or Long? — A Meaning Changes

Without the small つ these are different words, so the pause matters.

WITHOUT つ	SAY IT	ENGLISH	WITH つ	SAY IT	ENGLISH
おと	oto	sound	おっと	otto	husband
さか	saka	slope	さっか	sakka	writer
きて	kite	come!	きって	kitte	stamp
もと	moto	origin	もっと	motto	more

Not つ

The small つ and the full-size っ (tsu) are easy to mix up when you're reading fast. Check the size: if the character is small and sits low and to the right, it's the pause. If it is full size, it is *tsu*.

Where っ Appears

- **Before k, s, t and p:** the sounds you see in がっこう (kk), ざっし (ss), まって (tt) and いっぱい (pp). These are by far the most common.
- **Before ch, sh and ts:** the same rule, written *tch*, *ssh* and *tts* in romaji, as in *zasshi* (ざっし).
- **Never at the start of a word**, and never before a vowel, *n*, *m* or *r* in native Japanese words.
- **At the end of an exclamation:** あっ ! ("Oh!") and えっ ? ("What?!") end with a small つ that shows a sudden, sharp stop.

Read It — New Words

Read the Japanese first, then check the romaji. Remember to count the pause.

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	きっぷ	kippu	ticket	<i>ki-p-pu: three beats, with っ a silent one in the middle</i>
2	ざっし	zasshi	magazine	<i>za-s-shi: っ doubles the s</i>
3	にっき	nikki	diary	<i>ni-k-ki</i>
4	さっか	sakka	writer; author	<i>sa-k-ka</i>
5	まって	matte	wait!	<i>ma-t-te: a very useful word</i>
6	いっぱい	ippai	full; a lot	<i>i-p-pa-i</i>
7	もっと	motto	more	<i>mo-t-to</i>
8	がっこう	gakkō	school	<i>ga-k-ko-u</i>
9	ひっこし	hikkoshi	moving house	<i>hi-k-ko-shi</i>
10	せっけん	sekken	soap	<i>se-k-ke-n</i>

Real Japanese Tip — まって and もっと

Two small っ words you'll use all the time: まって ("wait!", casual; the polite form is まってください) and もっと ("more"), as in もっと ゆっくり ("more slowly"). If you can only learn two, learn those.

Review: Words from the Last Chapter

さんぽ (a walk) · たんぽぽ (dandelion) · ぺらぺら (fluent) · ぽかぽか (warm) ·
おなかが ぺこぺこ (I'm starving).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. What does the small つ do?

▼ Show answer

It adds a one-beat pause and doubles the following consonant: kippu, zasshi, matte, gakkō.

2. How many beats are in きつぷ?

▼ Show answer

Three: ki · (pause) · pu.

3. Read aloud and translate: がっこう · ざっし · にっき

▼ Show answer

gakkō (school) · zasshi (magazine) · nikki (diary)

4. Read aloud and translate: おと · おっと and もと · もっと

▼ Show answer

oto (sound) · otto (husband); moto (origin) · motto (more)

5. How do you tell つ from っ?

▼ Show answer

Size and position: つ is small and low to the right (a pause); っ is full size (tsu).

6. Write in hiragana: kippu · matte · motto (check the small つ).

▼ Show answer

きつぷ · まって · もっと

Coming Up in Chapter 2

Long vowels: how おかあさん (mother) differs from おかさん, why おう is read as a long *o*, and how the same idea gives you ありがとう, せんせい and とうきょう.