

JP

JAPANESE WRITING COURSE

Katakana 1

Eighteen short chapters that teach all 46 basic katakana, three characters at a time, with romaji throughout: memory hooks, look-alike warnings, the long-vowel mark, and real loanwords from Chapter 3 on, from taxi and coffee to Australia. The second course in the Japanese reading series.

18 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

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Katakana 1

Chapter 1 · Meet Katakana: A I U

Meet Katakana — カタカナ

You already know hiragana, so you know how Japanese syllables work. Katakana is the **second kana script**: exactly the same sounds, but with sharper, angular shapes. By the end of this chapter you'll know what katakana is for, how it relates to hiragana, and your first three characters (アイウ). Romaji is shown for everything, as before.

What Is Katakana For? — 何に使う？

Hiragana is for Japanese grammar and native words. Katakana does a different job:

USE	EXAMPLE	MEANING
Loanwords from other languages (mostly English)	コーヒー kōhī	coffee
Foreign place names	アメリカ Amerika	America
Foreign personal names	マイク Maiku	Mike
Sound effects and animal cries	ワンワン wan wan	woof woof
Emphasis , a bit like italics in English	Writers sometimes use katakana to make a word stand out.	

Why Learn It Early?

Katakana is everywhere in modern Japan: menus, shop signs, product names and manga. Many katakana words are English words in disguise, so once you can read the script, you can often **guess**

the meaning by sounding the word out. テニス (te-ni-su) is "tennis", and ホテル (ho-te-ru) is "hotel". That is the fun part of this course.

abc Same Sounds, New Shapes — おなじ音

Everything you learned about hiragana still applies: one character is one syllable and one beat, with the same 46 basic sounds in the same gojūon grid. Only the shapes change. Some are close twins and some look nothing alike.

	a	i	u	e	o
(vowels)	ア	イ	ウ	エ	オ
k	カ	キ	ク	ケ	コ
s	サ	シ	ス	セ	ソ
t	タ	チ	ツ	テ	ト
n	ナ	ニ	ヌ	ネ	ノ
h	ハ	ヒ	フ	ヘ	ホ
m	マ	ミ	ム	メ	モ
y	ヤ		ユ		ヨ
r	ラ	リ	ル	レ	ロ
w	ワ				ヲ
n	ン				

The three highlighted characters are today's. The rows are in the same order as the hiragana grid, so this course follows the same path as Hiragana 1.

✨ Your First Three Characters — ア イ ウ

Each katakana has a hiragana twin with the same sound. Here the pairs are あ→ア, い→イ and う→ウ. Say each aloud: clean, short vowels, as before.

ア

a

like the "a" in *father*, but short
("ah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an **axe**: a flat blade and a handle, like the hiragana あ with the loops cut away. Hiragana twin: あ.

イ

i

like the "ee" in *see*, but short
("ee")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an **icicle** hanging from a slanting roof. Hiragana twin: い.

ウ

u

like the "oo" in *moon*, but with relaxed, flat lips ("oo")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a woolly **hat** with a pointed top over a bowl: oo, a woolly hat. Hiragana twin: う.

Katakana Strokes Are Straighter

Katakana is built from short, straight strokes with sharp corners, where hiragana is rounded and flowing. The stroke order rules are the same: **top to bottom, left to right**. Open each "stroke order" ▶ link to watch the animation, then write each character 10 times on paper, saying its sound aloud.

Read It — First Look

Three characters make very few real words, and that's normal for the vowel row: most loanwords need consonants. For now, practise recognising and saying the sounds. Real words start very soon:

#	CHARACTERS	ROMAJI	NOTE
1	ア	a	a single beat, "ah"
2	アイ	ai	slide quickly from "ah" to "ee"; this is the start of アイス (ice) in Chapter 5
3	イア	ia	a sound drill: "ee-ah"

#	CHARACTERS	ROMAJI	NOTE
4	ウイ	ui	<i>a sound drill: "oo-ee"</i>
5	アウイ	au	<i>a three-beat drill</i>

Look-Alikes to Watch Later

ア looks a little like マ (ma), and ウ looks a little like ワ (wa) and フ (fu). You'll meet those in later chapters, and each time we'll point out the difference. For now, remember that ウ has a small **tick on top**.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Which sound does ア make: *a*, *i* or *u*?

▼ Show answer

a ("ah").

2. Read these aloud: イ・ウ・ア

▼ Show answer

i・u・a

3. Match each hiragana to its katakana twin: あ, い, う.

▼ Show answer

あ→ア・い→イ・う→ウ

4. Read aloud: アイ・ウイ・アウイ

▼ Show answer

ai · ui · aui

5. Write these in katakana: *i · u · ai* (check the stroke order as you write).

▼ Show answer

イ · ウ · アイ

6. Which script would you use to write the word "taxi" borrowed from English, and which for a Japanese verb ending?

▼ Show answer

Loanword: **katakana** (タクシー). Verb ending: **hiragana**.

Coming Up in Chapter 2

You've learned three of the five vowels. Next up: **エ** (e) and **オ** (o), which completes the vowel row, and you'll be able to read your first real word, **エア** (air).

Katakana 1

Chapter 2 · The Vowel Row: E O

🌿 Completing the Vowels — エ と オ

Two characters to go and the vowel row is done. Today you'll learn エ (e) and オ (o), see all five vowels with their hiragana twins, and read your first real katakana word. Romaji is shown for everything.

🌟 Your Next Two Characters — エ オ

Remember: Japanese vowels are short, clean and steady, with no gliding.

エ

e

like the "e" in *bed* ("eh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an elevator shaft: a top floor, a bottom floor and the pole between them. Hiragana twin: え.

オ

o

like the "o" in *more*, but short ("oh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an oar leaning on a post: a long shaft with a blade. Hiragana twin: お.

エ Is a Chinese Character in Disguise

エ looks almost identical to the kanji 工 (*kō*, "craft, work"), and that is where it comes from: katakana were made by taking a piece of a kanji. You can't confuse them for long, because the kanji appears inside ordinary Japanese text and the katakana inside loanwords, but it is a useful clue that katakana shapes are simplified bits of kanji.



The Complete Vowel Row — 母音

KATAKANA	HIRAGANA TWIN	ROMAJI
ア	あ	a
イ	い	i
ウ	う	u
エ	え	e
オ	お	o

Say the row in order, a-i-u-e-o, until it feels natural. Every other katakana in the course is built on one of these five vowel sounds.



Read It — Your First Katakana Word

Only one common loanword fits the five vowels, so the rest of the list is sound drills. From Chapter 3 the word lists grow fast.

#	CHARACTERS	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	エア	ea	air	from English air; you'll see it in エアコン (air conditioner) later
2	アエ	ae	(drill)	a sound drill: "ah-eh"
3	エイ	ei	(drill)	a drill: "eh-ee"
4	ウエ	ue	(drill)	a drill: "oo-eh"
5	オア	oa	(drill)	a drill: "oh-ah"
6	アオイ	aoi	(drill)	a three-beat drill

#	CHARACTERS	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
7	オイウ	oiu	(drill)	<i>a three-beat drill</i>

Katakana Words Sound Like English... Sort Of

エア is "air", but notice that Japanese has no "r" at the end of a syllable and no gliding "ay" sound, so the word is bent into two clean beats: *e-a*. This is the secret of katakana: the foreign word is re-spelled with Japanese sounds. When you can't recognise a word at first, say it out loud in a Japanese accent: the English often pops out.

Try It Yourself — んしゅう

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

1. Which sound does エ make, and which does オ make?

▼ Show answer

エ = *e* ("eh"); オ = *o* ("oh").

2. Say the five katakana vowels in order: アイウエオ

▼ Show answer

a · i · u · e · o

3. Match each hiragana to its katakana twin: え, お.

▼ Show answer

え → エ · お → オ

4. Read aloud and translate: エア

▼ Show answer

ea: air.

5. Read aloud: アエ・ウエ・アオイ

▼ Show answer

ae・ue・aoi

6. Write in katakana: ea・oa・aoi (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

エア・オア・アオイ

Coming Up in Chapter 3

The first consonant row: カ キ ク (ka, ki, ku). You'll also meet the long-vowel mark ー, which katakana uses constantly, and read キー (key) and カー (car).

Katakana 1

Chapter 3 · Ka Ki Ku

🌿 The K Row and the Long-Vowel Mark — カ キ ク —

Your first consonant row: カ キ ク (ka, ki, ku). You'll also learn a mark that isn't a character but that katakana can't live without: the **long-vowel mark** ー. With it you'll read five real words today. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — カ キ ク

カ

ka

like "ka" in *karate* ("kah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **karate** chop: a bent arm swinging down with a flick. Hiragana twin: か.

キ

ki

like "key", but short ("kee")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **key**: two bars across a long shaft. キ is literally the word キー (key) you'll read today. Hiragana twin: き.

ク

ku

like "coo", but short and relaxed ("koo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **cuckoo's** head and beak: a small hook and a big swoop. Hiragana twin: く.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

カ

か

ka

キ

き

ki

ク

く

ku

The Pair to Watch: カ and 力

力 looks almost identical to the kanji 力 (*chikara*, "power"), and that's its origin: 力 is a simplified piece of it. In loanwords it will always be the sound *ka*. Also, later in the course you'll meet タ (*ta*), which can look like ク. For now, ク has no extra stroke inside.

📖 The Long-Vowel Mark — —

In hiragana a long vowel is written by adding a vowel character (おかあさん). In katakana, long vowels are written with a single line, —. It means: hold the previous vowel for one more beat.

- キー = ki + — = "ki-i", two beats, written *kī* in romaji.
- カー = ka + — = "ka-a", two beats, written *kā*.
- In horizontal text — is a **horizontal** line; in vertical text it turns into a **vertical** line.
- It is **not** a character of its own, it has no sound by itself, and it never starts a word. It always follows a katakana and stretches it.
- Length matters: キ (one beat) and キー (two beats) are different words, just like the long and short sounds you may know from Japanese already.

Don't Confuse — with 一

The kanji 一 ("one") looks very similar to —, but it appears in ordinary Japanese text, not inside katakana words. If a horizontal line sits right after a katakana, it's the long-vowel mark.

📖 Read It — Real Words at Last

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	キー	<i>kī</i>	key	<i>long ī: two beats, ki-i</i>
2	カー	<i>kā</i>	car	<i>long ā: ka-a; as in カーナビ (car navigation) later</i>
3	カーキ	<i>kākī</i>	khaki	<i>a colour word</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
4	オーク	ōku	oak	<i>the tree (also an orc in fantasy games)</i>
5	エーカー	ēkā	acre	<i>e-e-ka-a: four beats</i>
6	クー	kū	(drill)	<i>a drill: ku-u</i>
7	アーク	āku	(drill)	<i>a drill: a-a-ku</i>

Count the Beats

Each katakana is one beat and — adds one more. So カーキ is **three** beats (ka-a-ki) and エーカー is **four** (e-e-ka-a). Count each — as a full beat and the rhythm falls into place.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: カ・キ・ク

▼ Show answer

ka · ki · ku

2. What does the mark — do?

▼ Show answer

It lengthens the vowel before it by one beat. It is not a character and has no sound of its own.

3. Read aloud and translate: キー・カー

▼ Show answer

kī (key) · kā (car)

4. Read aloud and translate: カーキ・オーク

▼ Show answer

kākī (khaki) · ōku (oak)

5. How many beats are in エーカー?

▼ Show answer

Four: エ・ー・カ・ー (e-e-ka-a).

6. Write in katakana: *kī* · *kā* · *ōku* (check stroke order).

▼ Show answer

キー・カー・オーク

Coming Up in Chapter 4

Two more K sounds: ケ (ke) and コ (ko). You'll be able to read ケーキ (cake) and ココア (cocoa).

Katakana 1

Chapter 4 · Ke Ko

🌿 Finishing the K Row — ケ コ

Two characters complete the K row today: ケ (ke) and コ (ko). Together with カ キ ク you can now read the whole row, and your word list jumps to five real words, including cake and cocoa. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Two New Characters — ケ コ

ケ

ke

like "ke" in *kettle* ("keh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **k**ettle: a pointed lid, a spout swinging out to the left and a long body. Hiragana twin: け.

コ

ko

like "co" in *cocoa*, but short ("koh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **co**rner: two lines meeting at a right angle, like a corner of a room. Hiragana twin: こ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ケ

け

ke

コ

こ

ko



The Complete K Row

KA

KI

KU

KE

KO

カ

キ

ク

ケ

コ

か

き

く

け

こ

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

Look-Alikes: コ vs ヌ, and ケ vs ク

コ (ko) is two lines and an open side, like a corner. Later in the course you'll meet ヌ (yu), which looks like コ with an extra line sticking out at the bottom. Also compare ケ with ク (ku): ケ has a third stroke, a long diagonal that crosses the short bar, and ク has only two.

Read It — Five Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ケーキ	kēki	cake	ke + ー + ki: three beats
2	ココア	kokoa	cocoa	ko-ko-a: three beats
3	オーケー	ōkē	OK	o-o-ke-e: four beats; very common
4	エコ	eko	eco; eco-friendly	short for ecology
5	ケア	kea	care	as in skin care or hair care
6	コケ	koke	(drill)	a sound drill: ko-ke
7	ケーク	kēku	(drill)	a drill: ke-e-ku

Bent English

オーケー is the English "OK" written as the two letter names "oh-kay", each stretched with ー. And コア shows the Japanese rule at work: no stressed syllables, just even beats, **ko-ko-a**, where English says "COH-koh". Say katakana words flat and even, and they'll sound much more natural.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ケ・コ・キ・ク・カ

▼ Show answer

ke・ko・ki・ku・ka

2. Read aloud and translate: ケーキ・ココア

▼ Show answer

kēki (cake)・kokoa (cocoa)

3. Read aloud and translate: オーケー・エコ

▼ Show answer

ōkē (OK)・eko (eco)

4. How many beats are in オーケー?

▼ Show answer

Four: オ・ー・ケ・ー (o-o-ke-e).

5. What is the difference between コ and ク in shape and sound?

▼ Show answer

コ is two lines at a corner and sounds like *ko*; ク is a hook with a swoop and sounds like *ku*.

6. Write in katakana: *kēki* · *kokoa* · *kea* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

ケーキ . ココア . ケア

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The S row begins: サ シ ス (sa, shi, su). You'll be able to read アイス (ice), スキー (ski), スイス (Switzerland) and more. Watch out for the look-alike pair シ and ツ, which we'll deal with when we reach ツ in Chapter 7.

Katakana 1

Chapter 5 · Sa Shi Su

🌿 The S Row Begins — サ シ ス

Three new characters: サ (sa), シ (shi) and ス (su). Note that the middle one is shi, not si, exactly as in hiragana. With them you can read nine real words today, from ice to circus. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — サ シ ス

サ

sa

like "sa" in *safari* ("sah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **s**aillboat: a mast with a crossbar, and the sail line beside it. Hiragana twin: さ.

シ

shi

like "she", short ("shee")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **she** crying: two tears falling sideways and a long swoop for her hair. Hiragana twin: し.

ス

su

like "su" in *suit*, relaxed ("soo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **superhero's** cape: a short bar for the shoulders and a long swoop flapping behind. Hiragana twin: す.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

サ

さ

sa

シ

し

shi

ス

す

su

Warning: シ Has a Look-Alike Twin

You'll meet ツ (tsu) in Chapter 7, and it looks very like シ. The usual trick: in シ the two short strokes are lying down, nearly horizontal like sideways eyes (and the long stroke sweeps *up*), while in ツ the short strokes stand upright (and the long stroke sweeps *down*). Keep that picture in mind: we'll practise it properly in Chapter 7.

Read It — Nine Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	アイス	aisu	ice; ice cream	<i>a-i-su: three beats</i>
2	スキー	sukī	ski; skiing	<i>su-ki-i</i>
3	スイス	suisu	Switzerland	<i>su-i-su</i>
4	スカイ	sukai	sky	<i>su-ka-i</i>
5	キス	kisu	kiss	<i>ki-su</i>
6	ケース	kēsu	case	<i>ke-e-su: a phone case, a suitcase...</i>
7	コース	kōsu	course	<i>ko-o-su: a golf course, a meal course</i>
8	サーカス	sākasu	circus	<i>sa-a-ka-su: four beats</i>
9	シーサー	shīsā	shisa	<i>the lion-dog guardians of Okinawa</i>

Extra Vowels

English has many S sounds that Japanese bends into *su*. In スキー and スカイ the English word starts with a bare "s" (ski, sky), but Japanese needs a vowel after every consonant, so it adds **su**: *su-ki*, *su-kai*. Whenever an English word has a lonely consonant, expect an extra vowel.



Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: サ・シ・ス

▼ Show answer

sa · shi · su

2. Read aloud and translate: アイス・スキー・スカイ

▼ Show answer

aisu (ice) · sukī (ski) · sukai (sky)

3. Read aloud and translate: スイス・キス・コース

▼ Show answer

suisu (Switzerland) · kisu (kiss) · kōsu (course)

4. Why does Japanese write *ski* as スキー (su-ki-i)?

▼ Show answer

Japanese syllables need a vowel after each consonant, so the English "s" gets an extra *su*, and ー stretches the final vowel.

5. How many beats are in サーカス?

▼ Show answer

Four: サ・ー・カ・ス (sa-a-ka-su).

6. Write in katakana: *aisu* · *suisu* · *sākasu* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

アイス・スイス・サーカス

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Two more S sounds: セ (se) and ソ (so). You'll be able to read ソース (sauce) and シーソー (seesaw). Watch out for the look-alike pair ソ and ン, which you'll meet again in Chapter 18.

Katakana 1

Chapter 6 · Se So

🌿 Finishing the S Row — セ ソ

Two characters complete the S row: セ (se) and ソ (so). Today also brings your first serious look-alike lesson, because ソ is easy to mix up with other characters. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Two New Characters — セ ソ

セ

se

like "se" in set ("seh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **seat** with a high back: a long seat running across and a tall back at the right. Hiragana twin: せ.

ソ

so

like "so" in sorry, short ("soh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **sewing** needle and its thread: a long needle slanting down, and a tiny dot of thread at the top. Hiragana twin: そ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

セ

せ

se

ソ

そ

so



The Complete S Row

SA

SHI

SU

SE

SO

サ

シ

ス

セ

ソ

さ

し

す

せ

そ

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

Look-Alikes: ソ, シ and ン

ソ (so) has **two** strokes, a short dot at the top and a long stroke slanting down, so it is different from シ (shi), which has **three**: always count the strokes. There's also ン (n), which you'll meet in Chapter 18: the two characters are very close, and the usual trick is that ソ's long stroke goes *down* from the top while ン's long stroke *sweeps up* from the bottom.



Read It — Five Real Words (and Two Drills)

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ソース	sōsu	sauce	so-o-su
2	ソーサー	sōsā	saucer	so-o-sa-a: four beats
3	シーソー	shīsō	seesaw	shi-i-so-o: four beats
4	スコア	sukoa	score	su-ko-a
5	アーサー	Āsā	Arthur (a name)	a-a-sa-a: four beats
6	セコ	seko	(drill)	a sound drill: se-ko
7	ソソ	soso	(drill)	a drill: so-so, compare ソ with シ

Sound, Not Spelling

Katakana words carry the English word's sound, not its spelling: *score* becomes *su-ko-a* (the "r" disappears and the "s" gets an extra vowel), and *sauce* becomes *sō-su*. When a katakana word doesn't look like English, try saying it in a flat Japanese accent first.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: セ・ソ・サ・シ・ス

▼ Show answer

se · so · sa · shi · su

2. Read aloud and translate: ソース・ソーサー

▼ Show answer

sōsu (sauce) · sōsā (saucer)

3. Read aloud and translate: シーソー・スコア

▼ Show answer

shīsō (seesaw) · sukoa (score)

4. How many strokes does ソ have, and how many does シ have?

▼ Show answer

ソ has two; シ has three.

5. How many beats are in シーソー?

▼ Show answer

Four: シ・ー・ソ・ー (shi-i-so-o).

6. Write in katakana: *sōsu* · *sukoa* · *shīsō* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

ソース・スコア・シーソー

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The T row begins: タ チ ツ (ta, chi, tsu). You'll read タクシー (taxi), タイ (Thailand) and ツアー (tour), and we'll finally deal with ツ against シ properly.

Katakana 1

Chapter 7 · Ta Chi Tsu

🌿 The T Row Begins — タ チ ツ

Three new characters: タ (ta), チ (chi) and ツ (tsu). As in hiragana, the middle two are not quite the Roman "ti" and "tu": it's chi and tsu. This is also the chapter where we settle the famous katakana look-alike, シ **versus** ツ. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — タ チ ツ

タ

ta

like "ta" in *taco* ("tah")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **table** seen from the side: a slanted top, a leg and a support. Hiragana twin: た.

チ

chi

like "chee" in *cheese*, short ("chee")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **child's** swing: a bar across the top and a rope hanging down with a bend. Hiragana twin: ち.

ツ

tsu

like the "tsu" of *tsunami* ("tsoo")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **tsunami**: three drops of spray falling *down* from a wave. Hiragana twin: つ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

タ

た

ta

チ

ち

chi

ツ

つ

tsu

⚠ The Big One: シ versus ツ

These two trip up almost everyone, so here is the pair side by side. Both have three strokes. The difference is the **direction**.

CHARACTER	SHORT STROKES	LONG STROKE	SOUND	PICTURE TO REMEMBER
シ	nearly horizontal , lying down like sideways eyes	sweeps up from the bottom left	shi	a crying <i>she</i> , tears falling sideways
ツ	more vertical , standing upright	sweeps down from the top	tsu	a <i>tsunami</i> , spray falling down

More Look-Alikes

ツ also resembles ソ (so), which you met last chapter: ソ has only **two** strokes and ツ has **three**. And タ (ta) looks like ク (ku) with an extra stroke inside: タ has three strokes, ク has two. When you read, don't judge a character in isolation: the whole word usually tells you which one it must be.

📖 Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	タクシー	takushī	taxi	<i>ta-ku-shi-i: four beats</i>
2	タイ	Tai	Thailand; tie	<i>ta-i; context tells you which</i>
3	ツアー	tsuā	tour	<i>tsu-a-a: three beats</i>
4	スーツ	sūtsu	suit	<i>su-u-tsu</i>
5	タコス	takosu	tacos	<i>ta-ko-su</i>
6	アーチ	āchi	arch	<i>a-a-chi</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
7	チーク	chīku	cheek (blusher); teak	<i>chi-i-ku</i>
8	ツタ	tsuta	(drill)	<i>a sound drill: tsu-ta</i>

Final Consonants

English has the sound "ts" at the end of words like *suits* and *cats*, but Japanese has no way to stop on a consonant, so it adds a vowel: *suit* becomes *sū-tsu*. Look at タイ too: it's both "Thailand" and "tie", and only the context tells you which is meant.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: タ・チ・ツ

▼ Show answer

ta · chi · tsu

2. Read aloud and translate: タクシー・ツアー

▼ Show answer

takushī (taxi) · tsuā (tour)

3. Read aloud and translate: スーツ・タコス・アーチ

▼ Show answer

sūtsu (suit) · takosu (tacos) · āchi (arch)

4. How do you tell シ from ツ?

▼ Show answer

シ: short strokes lying sideways, long stroke sweeping up. ツ: short strokes upright, long stroke sweeping down.

5. How many strokes do ソ, シ and ツ have?

▼ Show answer

ソ has two; シ and ツ each have three.

6. Write in katakana: *takushī* · *tsuā* · *sūtsu* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

タクシー . ツアー . スーツ

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Two more T sounds: テ (te) and ト (to), completing the T row. You'll read テスト (test), コート (coat), トースト (toast) and スタート (start).

Katakana 1

Chapter 8 · Te To

🌿 Finishing the T Row — テ ト

Two characters complete the T row: テ (te) and ト (to). With them you can read words like *test*, *coat* and *toast*, and the characters you have so far already give you a lot of vocabulary. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Two New Characters — テ ト

テ

te

like "te" in *ten* ("teh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **te**lephone pole: two crossbars at the top and a long post with a bend at the bottom.
Hiragana twin: て.

ト

to

like "to" in *tomato*, short ("toh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **to**tem pole with one branch: a tall post and a small arm pointing out. Hiragana twin: と.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

テ

て

te

ト

と

to



The Complete T Row

TA	CHI	TSU	TE	TO
タ	チ	ツ	テ	ト
た	ち	つ	て	と

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

Look-Alikes: テ and チ

テ (te) has **two bars** across the top with a long bent stroke below, while チ (chi), which you met last chapter, has a **short slanted stroke** on top of one bar. Both have three strokes, so look at the top. As for ト, it's a simple post with a small arm, a shape that rarely gets confused with anything.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	テスト	tesuto	test	<i>te-su-to</i>
2	テキスト	tekisuto	text; textbook	<i>te-ki-su-to</i>
3	コート	kōto	coat; (tennis) court	<i>ko-o-to</i>
4	トースト	tōsuto	toast	<i>to-o-su-to: four beats</i>
5	スタート	sutāto	start	<i>su-ta-a-to: four beats</i>
6	トーク	tōku	talk	<i>to-o-ku</i>
7	コスト	kosuto	cost	<i>ko-su-to</i>
8	トイ	toi	toy	<i>to-i</i>

Adding Vowels

The English words *test*, *text*, *toast*, *cost* and *start* all contain a consonant cluster, and Japanese has no way to pronounce one. Each gets vowels dropped in: *te-su-to*, *te-ki-su-to*, *to-o-su-to*, *ko-su-to*, *su-ta-a-to*. Notice the pattern: the vowel Japanese adds after "t" is almost always **o** (ト), and after "s" it's **u** (ス).

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: テ・ト・タ・チ・ツ

▼ Show answer

te · to · ta · chi · tsu

2. Read aloud and translate: テスト・コート

▼ Show answer

tesuto (test) · kōto (coat; court)

3. Read aloud and translate: トースト・スタート

▼ Show answer

tōsuto (toast) · sutāto (start)

4. Read aloud and translate: トーク・コスト・トイ

▼ Show answer

tōku (talk) · kosuto (cost) · toi (toy)

5. Which katakana does Japanese usually add after a final "t" in an English word, as in *test* and *start*?

▼ Show answer

ト (to): te-su-to, su-ta-a-to.

6. Write in katakana: *tesuto* · *tōsuto* · *sutāto* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

テスト · トースト · スタート

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The N row begins: ナ ニ ヌ (na, ni, nu). You'll read ツナ (tuna), ナース (nurse) and テニス (tennis), and meet the look-alike pair ヌ and ス.

Katakana 1

Chapter 9 · Na Ni Nu

🌿 The N Row Begins — ナ ニ ヌ

Three new characters: ナ (na), ニ (ni) and ヌ (nu). Don't confuse this "n" row with the lone character ン (n) that you'll meet in Chapter 18. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — ナ ニ ヌ

ナ

na

like "na" in *nacho* ("nah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **n**ature-trail signpost: a post with a crossbar near the top. Hiragana twin: な.

ニ

ni

like "knee", short ("nee")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: the number **two**: two bars. In Japanese the word for two is *ni*, and ニ comes from the kanji 二 (two). Hiragana twin: に.

ヌ

nu

like "noo" in *noon*, relaxed ("noo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **n**oodle twirled on chopsticks: a hook and a crossing swirl. Hiragana twin: ぬ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ナ

な

na

ニ

に

ni

ヌ

ぬ

nu

Look-Alikes: ヌ and ス, ニ and ミ

ヌ (nu) is close to ス (su), which you met in Chapter 5: ヌ has an extra small tail where its lines cross, which ス does not have. Compare them on the stroke-order pages. And ニ (ni) is two *horizontal* lines, whereas ミ (mi), which comes in Chapter 13, is three *slanting* lines. Horizontal and two means ni; slanting and three means mi.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ツナ	tsuna	tuna	<i>tsu-na</i>
2	ナース	nāsu	nurse	<i>na-a-su</i>
3	テニス	tenisu	tennis	<i>te-ni-su</i>
4	ナイス	naisu	nice ("Nice one!")	<i>na-i-su; said when someone does well</i>
5	ナイト	naito	night; knight	<i>na-i-to</i>
6	ケニア	Kenia	Kenya	<i>ke-ni-a</i>
7	カヌー	kanū	canoe	<i>ka-nu-u</i>
8	テナー	tenā	tenor	<i>te-na-a</i>

Borrowed Meanings

Look at ナイス: it's the English word *nice*, but Japanese uses it as a casual cheer, something like "Nice one!" or "Well done!" when a friend scores in a game. Katakana words sometimes drift from their English meaning, so treat the English as a hint, not a guarantee: ナース is a nurse, but a ナイト can be a night or a knight.



Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ナ ・ ニ ・ ヌ

▼ Show answer

na ・ ni ・ nu

2. Read aloud and translate: ツナ ・ ナース ・ テニス

▼ Show answer

tsuna (tuna) ・ nāsu (nurse) ・ tennisu (tennis)

3. Read aloud and translate: ナイス ・ ナイト

▼ Show answer

naisu (nice) ・ naito (night; knight)

4. Read aloud and translate: ケニア ・ カヌー

▼ Show answer

Kenia (Kenya) ・ kanū (canoe)

5. How can you tell ニ (ni) from ミ (mi, coming in Chapter 13)?

▼ Show answer

ニ is two horizontal lines; ミ is three slanting lines.

6. Write in katakana: tennisu ・ tsuna ・ nāsu (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

テニス ・ ツナ ・ ナース

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Two more N sounds: ネ (ne) and ノ (no). You'll read ノート (notebook) and ネクタイ (necktie), and see how simple ノ is, a single stroke.

Katakana 1

Chapter 10 · Ne No

🌿 Finishing the N Row — ネ ノ

Two characters complete the N row: ネ (ne) and ノ (no). One of them is the most complicated shape you've met so far (four strokes) and the other is the simplest (one stroke). Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Two New Characters — ネ ノ

ネ

ne

like "ne" in *net* ("neh")

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **neck**tie hanging on a rack: a hook on top and a crossed knot below. Hiragana twin: ね.

ノ

no

like "no" in *note*, short ("noh")

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: the single slash of a **no**-entry sign. One stroke, the simplest katakana. Hiragana twin: の.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ネ

ね

ne

ノ

の

no



The Complete N Row

NA	NI	NU	NE	NO
ナ	ニ	ヌ	ネ	ノ
な	に	ぬ	ね	の

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

ノ Is the Long Stroke of ソ, シ, ツ and シ

ノ (no) is a single slanting stroke, and it is easy to see it hidden inside several look-alikes: ソ, シ and ツ all have one similar stroke plus extra marks. So count the strokes: **one stroke** means ノ (no), **two** means ソ (so), and **three** means シ (shi) or ツ (tsu).

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ノート	nōto	notebook	<i>no-o-to; not "note" but a school notebook</i>
2	ネクタイ	nekutai	necktie	<i>ne-ku-ta-i: four beats</i>
3	コーナー	kōnā	corner; section (of a shop)	<i>ko-o-na-a: four beats</i>
4	ノース	nōsu	north	<i>no-o-su</i>
5	トナー	tonā	toner (printer)	<i>to-na-a</i>
6	ノー	nō	no	<i>no-o; as in ノーコメント later</i>
7	ネス	Nesu	Ness (as in Loch Ness)	<i>ne-su</i>

Katakana Meanings

Notice that ノー卜 means a **notebook** (the English *note* plus the ー and 卜), not a musical note or a short message. Likewise コーナー is a corner, but in a shop it also means a department or section: "the books corner". Katakana words keep their English roots but pick up their own meanings, so when something doesn't fit, check the context.



Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ネ・ノ・ナ・ニ・ヌ

▼ Show answer

ne · no · na · ni · nu

2. Read aloud and translate: ノート・ネクタイ

▼ Show answer

nōto (notebook) · nekutai (necktie)

3. Read aloud and translate: コーナー・ノース・トナー

▼ Show answer

kōnā (corner) · nōsu (north) · tonā (toner)

4. How many strokes do ノ, ソ and シ have?

▼ Show answer

ノ has one; ソ has two; シ has three.

5. How many beats are in ネクタイ?

▼ Show answer

Four: ネ・ク・タ・イ (ne-ku-ta-i).

6. Write in katakana: *nōto* · *nekutai* · *nōsu* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

ノート・ネクタイ・ノース

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The H row begins: ハ ヒ フ (ha, hi, fu). You'll read コーヒー (coffee), ハート (heart), ナイフ (knife) and ヒーター (heater).

Katakana 1

Chapter 11 · Ha Hi Fu

🌱 The H Row Begins — ハ ヒ フ

Three new characters: ハ (ha), ヒ (hi) and フ (fu). The big payoff today is コーヒー, coffee, the example from Chapter 1 that you can finally read yourself. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — ハ ヒ フ

ハ

ha

like "ha" in *ha-ha* ("hah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: ha-ha: two strokes spreading apart like the corners of a laughing mouth.
Hiragana twin: は.

ヒ

hi

like "hee" in *heed*, short ("hee")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a high-**hee**led shoe seen from the side: a flat sole and a curved heel.
Hiragana twin: ひ.

フ

fu

a soft "foo", made by blowing gently with rounded lips, not by touching teeth to lip

1 stroke · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a funnel: one stroke with a flat top and a spout bending down. Hiragana twin: ふ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ハ

は

ha

ヒ

ひ

hi

フ

ふ

fu

The Japanese "F" Is Not the English "F"

The Japanese **fu** is made by blowing air between your lips, as if cooling soup, rather than by pressing your top teeth on your lower lip. In romaji it's spelled *fu*, but it sounds like a softer cousin of "h". You'll hear this in words like ナイフ and ハーフ.

Look-Alikes: フ, ウ and ワ

フ (fu) is a single stroke. ウ (u), which you learned in Chapter 1, has an extra **tick on top**, and ワ (wa), which comes in Chapter 18, has an extra **short stroke on the left**. If you see a plain bent line with no extras, it's フ. Also, ハ (ha) will have a close relative in Chapter 12: ヘ (he).

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	コーヒー	kōhī	coffee	<i>ko-o-hi-i: four beats</i>
2	ハート	hāto	heart	<i>ha-a-to</i>
3	ナイフ	naifu	knife	<i>na-i-fu: the English "k" is silent, and so it is here</i>
4	ヒーター	hītā	heater	<i>hi-i-ta-a: four beats</i>
5	ハーフ	hāfu	half	<i>ha-a-fu</i>
6	ソフト	sofuto	soft; software	<i>so-fu-to</i>
7	シフト	shifuto	shift (work shift)	<i>shi-fu-to</i>
8	ハイ	hai	yes; hi	<i>ha-i; the everyday "yes" is usually written in hiragana</i>
9	ハイテク	haiteku	high-tech	<i>ha-i-te-ku</i>

Listen for the English

Look at コーヒー: the English *coffee* has an "f" sound in the middle, but basic katakana has no "fi" sound, so Japanese substitutes **hi**: *ko-o-hi-i*. A good habit is to read each katakana word aloud, quickly, and listen for the English: with ヒーター, "heater" appears almost at once.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ハ・ヒ・フ

▼ Show answer

ha · hi · fu

2. Read aloud and translate: コーヒー・ハート

▼ Show answer

kōhī (coffee) · hāto (heart)

3. Read aloud and translate: ナイフ・ヒーター・ハーフ

▼ Show answer

naifu (knife) · hītā (heater) · hāfu (half)

4. Read aloud and translate: ソフト・シフト・ハイテク

▼ Show answer

sofuto (soft; software) · shifuto (shift) · haiteku (high-tech)

5. How can you tell フ from ウ?

▼ Show answer

フ is a single bent stroke; ウ has an extra tick on top.

6. Write in katakana: *kōhī* · *hāto* · *naifu* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

コーヒー . ハート . ナイフ

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Two more H sounds: ヘ (he) and ホ (ho), completing the H row. You'll read ヘア (hair) and ホース (hose), and see how ヘ differs from ハ.

Katakana 1

Chapter 12 · He Ho

🌿 Finishing the H Row — ヘ ホ

Two characters complete the H row: ヘ (he) and ホ (ho). One of them is a single stroke and is almost identical to its hiragana twin, so it'll be easy. Romaji is shown for everything.

🌟 Your Two New Characters — ヘ ホ

he

like "he" in *hen* ("heh")

1 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **h**edge or a **h**ill: one stroke going up and then down. Hiragana twin: え, which is almost the same shape.

ho

like "ho" in *hotel*, short ("hoh")

4 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **h**oly cross with a candle on each side: a cross in the middle and a stroke on each side. Hiragana twin: ほ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ヘ

へ

he

ホ

ほ

ho

abc The Complete H Row

HA

HI

FU

HE

HO

ハ

ヒ

フ

ヘ

ホ

は

ひ

ふ

へ

ほ

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

へ and え: The Twins That Look Alike

へ (katakana) and え (hiragana) are almost the same shape; the katakana is a little sharper. They are among the few kana you can mistake between scripts, so let the **context** help you: inside a loanword it's へ. Also note へ has just *one* stroke while ハ (ha) has *two*.

Look-Alikes: ホ and ネ

ホ (ho) and ネ (ne) both have four strokes. Check the beginning: ホ starts with a horizontal bar across the top, while ネ starts with a small dot on top.



Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ヘア	hea	hair	he-a: as in ヘアケア (hair care)
2	ホース	hōsu	hose	ho-o-su
3	ホスト	hosuto	host	ho-su-to
4	ソーホー	Sōhō	Soho	so-o-ho-o: four beats
5	ヘイト	heito	hate (as in hate speech)	he-i-to
6	ホーホー	hōhō	(drill)	a drill: ho-o-ho-o, four beats

Any Foreign Word

Katakana can be used to write any foreign word, not just English ones: ソーホー is the London district, and the same script will write the names of cities, people and brands from all over the world. When you read a new katakana word, ask yourself: is it a place, a name or an everyday borrowed word? The context usually tells you.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ヘ・ホ・ハ・ヒ・フ

▼ Show answer

he · ho · ha · hi · fu

2. Read aloud and translate: ヘア・ホース

▼ Show answer

hea (hair) · hōsu (hose)

3. Read aloud and translate: ホスト・ソーホー

▼ Show answer

hosuto (host) · Sōhō (Soho)

4. How many strokes do ヘ and ハ have?

▼ Show answer

ヘ has one; ハ has two.

5. How can you tell ホ from ネ?

▼ Show answer

Both have four strokes. ホ starts with a horizontal bar; ネ starts with a small dot on top.

6. Write in katakana: *hea* · *hōsu* · *hosuto* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

ヘア・ホース・ホスト

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The M row begins: マ ミ ム (ma, mi, mu). You'll read ハム (ham), マスク (mask), ホーム (platform; home) and ムース (mousse), and meet the look-alike pair ア and マ.

Katakana 1

Chapter 13 · Ma Mi Mu

🌱 The M Row Begins — マ ミ ム

Three new characters: マ (ma), ミ (mi) and ム (mu). You can read ten real words today, including マイク, the "Mike" from Chapter 1. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — マ ミ ム

ma

like "ma" in *mama* ("mah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a mailbox with a flag: a flat top and a flag slanting down. Hiragana twin: ま.

mi

like "me", short ("mee")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: three cat whiskers: **miaow**. Also, three slanting lines for the third note, *mi*, of do-re-mi. Hiragana twin: み.

mu

like "moo", short and relaxed ("moo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a cow's horn: a **mooing** cow with a pointed horn and a little tick. Hiragana twin: む.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

マ

ま

ma

ミ

み

mi

ム

む

mu

Look-Alikes: マ and ア, ミ and ニ

マ (ma) is easy to confuse with ア (a), which you learned in Chapter 1: both start with a bar, but ア's second stroke is a long slash crossing down through the bar, while マ ends with a short tick. Compare them side by side on their stroke-order pages. And ミ (mi) is three *slanting* lines, while ニ (ni), from Chapter 9, is two *horizontal* lines.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ハム	hamu	ham	<i>ha-mu</i>
2	マスク	masuku	mask	<i>ma-su-ku</i>
3	ホーム	hōmu	(station) platform; home	<i>ho-o-mu</i>
4	ムース	mūsu	mousse	<i>mu-u-su</i>
5	マーク	māku	mark; logo	<i>ma-a-ku</i>
6	ミス	misu	mistake (a "miss")	<i>mi-su</i>
7	ミニ	mini	mini	<i>mi-ni</i>
8	マナー	manā	manners	<i>ma-na-a</i>
9	テーマ	tēma	theme	<i>te-e-ma</i> : borrowed from German <i>Thema</i> , not English
10	マイク	maiku	microphone; Mike	<i>ma-i-ku</i> : a mic, and also the name from Chapter 1

Not Only English

Not every katakana word comes from English. テーマ (theme) comes from the German *Thema*, and many other loanwords come from Portuguese, Dutch, French and other languages. Don't be

surprised if a katakana word doesn't sound quite like the English one: it may not be English at all. Meanwhile, マイク can be both the name Mike and a microphone, so context is your guide.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: マ ・ ミ ・ ム

▼ Show answer

ma · mi · mu

2. Read aloud and translate: ハム ・ マスク ・ ホーム

▼ Show answer

hamu (ham) · masuku (mask) · hōmu (platform; home)

3. Read aloud and translate: マーク ・ ミス ・ ミニ

▼ Show answer

māku (mark) · misu (mistake) · mini (mini)

4. Read aloud and translate: マナー ・ テーマ ・ マイク

▼ Show answer

manā (manners) · tēma (theme) · maiku (microphone; Mike)

5. How can you tell ≡ from 二?

▼ Show answer

≡ is three slanting lines; 二 is two horizontal lines.

6. Write in katakana: hamu · masuku · maiku (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

ハム・マスク・マイク

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Two more M sounds: め (me) and も (mo), completing the M row. You'll read めも (memo), アニめ (anime) and めキシコ (Mexico).

Katakana 1

Chapter 14 · Me Mo

🌿 Finishing the M Row — ✕ 𐰢

Two characters complete the M row: ✕ (me) and 𐰢 (mo). Today you also get a word many people learn Japanese for: アニメ. Romaji is shown for everything.

🌟 Your Two New Characters — ✕ 𐰢

me

like "me" in *mess* ("meh")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: an X on a treasure map marking the spot: **me**, here! Two crossing strokes. Hiragana twin: め.

mo

like "mo" in *more*, short ("moh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **mop**: a handle with two crossbars. Hiragana twin: も.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

め

め

me

も

も

mo

abc

The Complete M Row

MA	MI	MU	ME	MO
マ	ミ	ム	メ	モ
ま	み	む	め	も

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

Look-Alikes: メ and ナ, and a Kanji Origin for モ

メ (me) is two strokes that *cross* like an X, while ナ (na), from Chapter 9, has a horizontal bar with a stroke through it. Check that the strokes really cross, like a multiplication sign. And モ (mo) comes from the kanji 毛 (*ke*, "hair, fur"), the same way 工 came from 工 and 力 from 力.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	メモ	memo	memo; note	<i>me-mo</i>
2	アニメ	anime	anime	<i>a-ni-me</i> : the word you came here for
3	メキシコ	Mekishiko	Mexico	<i>me-ki-shi-ko</i> : four beats
4	メーカー	mēkā	maker; manufacturer	<i>me-e-ka-a</i>
5	メイク	meiku	make-up	<i>me-i-ku</i>
6	メーター	mētā	meter (taxi meter, gas meter)	<i>me-e-ta-a</i>
7	モーター	mōtā	motor	<i>mo-o-ta-a</i>
8	モスク	mosuku	mosque	<i>mo-su-ku</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
9	モノ	mono	mono; thing	<i>mo-no</i>

Words That Travel

Look at アニメ: it's actually the Japanese shortening of the English word *animation*, and Japanese then sends it back out to the world: the borrowing goes in both directions.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: メ・モ・マ・ミ・ム

▼ Show answer

me · mo · ma · mi · mu

2. Read aloud and translate: メモ・アニメ・メキシコ

▼ Show answer

memo (memo) · anime (anime) · Mekishiko (Mexico)

3. Read aloud and translate: メーカー・メイク・メーター

▼ Show answer

mēkā (maker) · meiku (make-up) · mētā (meter)

4. Read aloud and translate: モーター・モスク・モノ

▼ Show answer

mōtā (motor) · mosuku (mosque) · mono (mono; thing)

5. How can you tell ✕ from ナ?

▼ Show answer

✕ is two strokes crossing like an X; ナ has a horizontal bar with a stroke through it.

6. Write in katakana: *memo* · *anime* · *mōtā* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

メモ · アニメ · モーター

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The Y row: ヤ ュ ヨ (ya, yu, yo). Only three characters in this row, since Japanese has no *yi* or *ye*. You'll read タイヤ (tyre), ヌーモア (humour) and ヨーヨー (yo-yo).

Katakana 1

Chapter 15 · Ya Yu Yo

🌿 The Y Row — ヤ ュ ヨ

Three new characters: ヤ (ya), ュ (yu) and ヨ (yo). The Y row has only three characters, because Japanese has no basic yi or ye, so it's a short chapter with a lot of fun words. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — ヤ ュ ヨ

ya

like "ya" in *yacht* ("yah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a yak: a bar for its back and a big horn curving out on one side. Hiragana twin: や.

yu

like "you", short ("yoo")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a U shape with its tail stretching out along the base: say *you*. Hiragana twin: ゆ.

yo

like "yo" in *yo-yo*, short ("yoh")

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a backwards E: three bars and a spine, and you can say *yo* to a friend. Hiragana twin: よ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ヤ

や

ya

ユ

ゆ

yu

ヨ

よ

yo

Look-Alikes: ム and コ

㇏ (yu) is a close relative of ㇏ (ko), which you learned in Chapter 4: ㇏ is ㇏ with an **extra line** along the bottom that sticks out to the right. As promised, now you can tell them apart: ㇏ is a corner, ㇏ is a corner sitting on a ledge. And ㇏ (yo) looks like a backwards E, which is not confusable with ㇏ (e), the plain I-beam from Chapter 2.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	タイヤ	taiya	tyre; tire	<i>ta-i-ya</i>
2	ユーモア	yūmoa	humour	<i>yu-u-mo-a: four beats</i>
3	ヨーヨー	yōyō	yo-yo	<i>yo-o-yo-o: four beats</i>
4	ヤマハ	Yamaha	Yamaha (the company)	<i>ya-ma-ha</i>
5	ユニセフ	Yunisefu	UNICEF	<i>yu-ni-se-fu</i>
6	ヤク	yaku	yak	<i>ya-ku</i>
7	ヨーク	yōku	York; yolk	<i>yo-o-ku</i>

Brand Names

Katakana is also used for company and brand names: ヤマハ is Yamaha, and ユニセフ is UNICEF. In Japan you'll see katakana on shop signs, product packaging and adverts, often chosen because it looks modern or international. Reading it gives you a head start on everyday life there.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ヤ・ユ・ヨ

▼ Show answer

ya · yu · yo

2. Read aloud and translate: タイヤ・ユーモア・ヨーヨー

▼ Show answer

taiya (tyre) · yūmoa (humour) · yōyō (yo-yo)

3. Read aloud: ヤマハ・ユニセフ

▼ Show answer

Yamaha (Yamaha) · Yunisefu (UNICEF)

4. Read aloud and translate: ヤク・ヨーク

▼ Show answer

yaku (yak) · yōku (York; yolk)

5. How can you tell ㄣ from ㄣ?

▼ Show answer

ㄣ has an extra line along the bottom that sticks out to the right; ㄣ is just a corner.

6. Write in katakana: taiya · yūmoa · yōyō (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

タイヤ・ユーモア・ヨーヨー

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The R row begins: ラ リ ル (ra, ri, ru). You'll read カメラ (camera), アメリカ (America), ミルク (milk), ホテル (hotel) and even オーストラリア (Australia). It's the biggest word-list chapter yet.

Katakana 1

Chapter 16 · Ra Ri Ru

🌿 The R Row Begins — ラ リ ル

Three new characters: ラ (ra), リ (ri) and ル (ru). This is the **biggest word-list chapter** in the course: with these three you can read cameras, hotels, countries and even ice cream. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Three New Characters — ラ リ ル

ラ

ra

a quick tap of the tongue,
between English "r", "l" and
"d", then "ah"

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **ramp**: a short
bar on top and a long slope
running down to the left.
Hiragana twin: ら.

リ

ri

the same tap, then "ee"

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: two **river**
banks: a short bank on the left
and a longer one curving on
the right. Hiragana twin: り.

ル

ru

the same tap, then "oo"

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **runner's** legs:
one leg straight, one leg
flicking out as it runs. Hiragana
twin: る.

KATAKANA	HIRAGANA TWIN	ROMAJI
ラ	ら	ra
リ	り	ri
ル	る	ru

The Japanese R: One Sound for Both R and L

The Japanese **r** is a single quick tap of the tip of the tongue just behind the upper teeth, a sound somewhere between English "r", "l" and "d". Japanese has no separate "l", so English words with an *l* use the R row too: ホテル (ho-te-**ru**, hotel), ミルク (mi-**ru**-ku, milk) and ルール (**ru**-u-**ru**, rule). Don't roll or curl your tongue: just tap.

Look-Alikes: リ, ソ and シ

リ (ri) is two **upright** strokes: a short one on the left and a long one on the right. The slanting characters ソ, シ and ツ lean over, so if the strokes stand up, it's リ. And watch for ル (ru) against レ (re), which you'll meet in the next chapter.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	カメラ	kamera	camera	<i>ka-me-ra</i>
2	アメリカ	Amerika	America	<i>a-me-ri-ka</i>
3	ミルク	miruku	milk	<i>mi-ru-ku</i>
4	ホテル	hoteru	hotel	<i>ho-te-ru</i>
5	ルール	rūru	rule	<i>ru-u-ru</i>
6	イタリア	Itaria	Italy	<i>i-ta-ri-a</i>
7	アフリカ	Afurika	Africa	<i>a-fu-ri-ka</i>
8	オーストラリア	Ōsutoraria	Australia	<i>o-o-su-to-ra-ri-a</i> : seven beats
9	アイスクリーム	aisukurīmu	ice cream	<i>a-i-su-ku-ri-i-mu</i> : seven beats

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
10	コアラ	koara	koala	<i>ko-a-ra</i>
11	ラテ	rate	latte	<i>ra-te</i>
12	リスト	risuto	list	<i>ri-su-to</i>
13	ルーム	rūmu	room	<i>ru-u-mu</i>
14	テラス	terasu	terrace	<i>te-ra-su</i>

Country Names

Notice how country names look in katakana: アメリカ, イタリア, アフリカ and オーストラリア all end in a vowel because the Japanese syllable always does. Names of most countries outside East Asia are written in katakana, so this chapter alone lets you read a good part of a world map.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ラ・リ・ル

▼ Show answer

ra・ri・ru

2. Read aloud and translate: カメラ・ミルク・ホテル

▼ Show answer

kamera (camera)・miruku (milk)・hoteru (hotel)

3. Read aloud and translate: アメリカ・イタリア・アフリカ

▼ Show answer

Amerika (America) · Itaria (Italy) · Afurika (Africa)

4. Read aloud and translate: オーストラリア · アイスクリーム

▼ Show answer

Ōsutoraria (Australia) · aisukurīmu (ice cream)

5. Why does Japanese write the English *l* in *hotel* with the R row?

▼ Show answer

Japanese has no separate "l" sound: the R row, a quick tongue tap, covers both English r and l.

6. Write in katakana: *kamera* · *hoteru* · *koara* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

カメラ · ホテル · コアラ

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Two more R sounds: レ (re) and ロ (ro), completing the R row. You'll read カレー (curry), トイレ (toilet), ロシア (Russia) and ヒーロー (hero).

Katakana 1

Chapter 17 · Re Ro

🌿 Finishing the R Row — レ □

Two characters complete the R row: レ (re) and □ (ro). Both are simple shapes, and between them you can read トイレ (toilet), possibly the most useful katakana word in Japan. Romaji is shown for everything.

✨ Your Two New Characters — レ □

re

the same tap, then "eh"

1 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a check mark: a **re**-check. One stroke, a straight stem that kicks out at the bottom.
Hiragana twin: れ.

ro

the same tap, then "oh"

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a **room**: a square box with four walls. It comes from the kanji 口 (*kuchi*, "mouth").
Hiragana twin: ろ.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

レ

れ

re

ロ

ろ

ro



The Complete R Row

RA

RI

RU

RE

RO

ラ

リ

ル

レ

ロ

ら

り

る

れ

ろ

Top row katakana, bottom row hiragana: say each pair aloud.

Look-Alikes: レ and ル, ロ and □

レ (re) has **one** stroke, and ル (ru), from the last chapter, has **two**: count them. And ロ (ro) is almost identical to the kanji 口 (*kuchi*, "mouth"), which is where it comes from. In a katakana word it's always *ro*.

Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	カレー	karē	curry	<i>ka-re-e</i>
2	トイレ	toire	toilet	<i>to-i-re</i> : you'll want this one in Japan
3	ロシア	Roshia	Russia	<i>ro-shi-a</i>
4	ヒーロー	hīrō	hero	<i>hi-i-ro-o</i> : four beats
5	ローマ	Rōma	Rome	<i>ro-o-ma</i>
6	レース	rēsu	race; lace	<i>re-e-su</i>
7	レター	retā	letter	<i>re-ta-a</i>
8	リレー	rirē	relay	<i>ri-re-e</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
9	ソロ	soro	solo	so-ro
10	コロナ	korona	corona	ko-ro-na
11	レシート	reshīto	receipt	re-shi-i-to: four beats
12	アロエ	aroe	aloe	a-ro-e

Curry

Look at カレー: curry arrived in Japan from Britain, not India, and it has become one of the country's favourite everyday meals, カレーライス (curry rice). Japanese people eat it so often that it's sometimes called a national dish, even though the name itself is a borrowed word. Katakana is a window onto what a country has adopted from elsewhere.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: レ・ロ・ラ・リ・ル

▼ Show answer

re・ro・ra・ri・ru

2. Read aloud and translate: カレー・トイレ

▼ Show answer

karē (curry)・toire (toilet)

3. Read aloud and translate: ロシア・ローマ・ヒーロー

▼ Show answer

Roshia (Russia) · Rōma (Rome) · hīrō (hero)

4. Read aloud and translate: レシート・リレー・ソロ

▼ Show answer

reshīto (receipt) · rirē (relay) · soro (solo)

5. How can you tell レ from ル?

▼ Show answer

レ has one stroke; ル has two.

6. Write in katakana: *karē* · *toire* · *Rōma* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

カレー・トイレ・ローマ

Coming Up in Chapter 5

The last chapter of the course: ワ ヲ ン (wa, wo, n). You'll read ワイン(wine), ラーメン(ramen), レモン(lemon) and レストラン(restaurant), meet the final look-alike pair ソ and ン, and finish with a Course Complete recap.

Katakana 1

Chapter 18 · Wa Wo N

🌿 The Last Three — ワ ヲ ン

The final three of the 46 basic katakana: ワ (wa), ヲ (wo) and ン (n). After this chapter you have the complete basic katakana set. Romaji is shown for everything, one last time.

✨ Your Three New Characters — ワ ヲ ン

ワ

wa

like "wa" in *water* ("wah")

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a water

bucket: the hat of ウ taken off, leaving just the bucket.

Hiragana twin: わ.

ヲ

wo

pronounced just o ("oh"), the same as オ

3 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a wobbly ヲ: three bars with a slash through them. Rare: see below.
Hiragana twin: を.

ン

n

a nasal "n" that takes a full beat on its own

2 strokes · [stroke order](#) ▶

Memory hook: a nod: a tiny mark on the left and a long nod upward. Hiragana twin: ん.

KATAKANA

HIRAGANA TWIN

ROMAJI

ワ

わ

wa

ヲ

を

wo (pronounced o)

ン

ん

n

ヲ Is Rare

In hiragana, を is everywhere, because it marks the object of a sentence. Its katakana twin フ is very rarely seen: katakana is mostly for single words, not sentences, so it has no grammar job. You may meet it in stylised writing, for example フタク, a playful spelling of *otaku*. Learn to recognise it, but don't worry about writing it.

ン: A Beat of Its Own

ン is a syllable by itself: it takes **one full beat**, never starts a word, and its sound shifts slightly with what follows (like the n in *ten*, the m in *ham* or the ng in *sing*). Count it: ワイン is wa-i-n, three beats; ラーメン is ra-a-me-n, four beats.

⚠ The Last Look-Alike: ソ versus ン

Both have **two** strokes and a short mark beside a long stroke. The difference is the direction of the long stroke.

CHARACTER	SHORT STROKE	LONG STROKE	SOUND
ソ	a dot at the top, more upright	starts at the top and runs down	so
ン	a dot at the left, more sideways	starts at the bottom and sweeps up	n

One More: ワ, ウ and フ

ワ (wa) has an extra short stroke at the left; ウ (u) has a tick on top; フ (fu) has neither. With this, all the look-alike pairs of katakana 1 are covered.

📖 Read It — Real Words

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ワイン	wain	wine	<i>wa-i-n: three beats</i>
2	ラーメン	rāmen	ramen	<i>ra-a-me-n: four beats</i>

#	WORD	ROMAJI	ENGLISH	NOTE
3	レモン	remon	lemon	<i>re-mo-n</i>
4	レストラン	resutoran	restaurant	<i>re-su-to-ra-n: five beats</i>
5	サイン	sain	sign; autograph	<i>sa-i-n</i>
6	ヒント	hintō	hint	<i>hi-n-to</i>
7	ハワイ	Hawai	Hawaii	<i>ha-wa-i</i>
8	フランス	Furansu	France	<i>fu-ra-n-su</i>
9	ワンワン	wanwan	woof woof	<i>the dog sound from Chapter 1</i>
10	テント	tento	tent	<i>te-n-to</i>
11	ランチ	ranchi	lunch	<i>ra-n-chi</i>
12	ミント	minto	mint	<i>mi-n-to</i>
13	ライン	rain	line (LINE chat app)	<i>ra-i-n</i>

Real Katakana

Look at ライン: it's both the English *line* and the name of Japan's most popular chat app, LINE. And ワンワン, the dog's bark from Chapter 1, now reads as wa-n-wa-n. You can read the sample sentence from Chapter 1 too: the katakana part, コーヒー, is yours.

Try It Yourself — れんしゅう

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

1. Read aloud: ワ・ヲ・ン

▼ Show answer

wa · wo (pronounced o) · n

2. Read aloud and translate: ワイン・ラーメン・レモン

▼ Show answer

wain (wine) · rāmen (ramen) · remon (lemon)

3. Read aloud and translate: レストラン・サイン・ヒント

▼ Show answer

resutoran (restaurant) · sain (sign) · hinto (hint)

4. Read aloud and translate: ハワイ・フランス・ランチ

▼ Show answer

Hawai (Hawaii) · Furansu (France) · ranchi (lunch)

5. How can you tell ヲ from ン?

▼ Show answer

ヲ: the long stroke runs down from the top. ン: the long stroke sweeps up from the bottom.

6. Write in katakana: *wain · rāmen · remon* (check the stroke order).

▼ Show answer

ワイン・ラーメン・レモン



Course Complete — おめでとう！

You have learned all 46 basic katakana, with plenty of real loanwords along the way. Here is the whole journey in one table.

CHAPTER	NEW CHARACTERS	YOU CAN NOW...
1	Meet Katakana: ア イ ウ	You can now what katakana is for, and read the first three characters.
2	エ オ	You can now read all five vowels.
3	カ キ ク + ー	You can now read the K row start and stretch vowels with ー.
4	ケ コ	You can now finish the K row: ケーキ, ココア.
5	サ シ ス	You can now start the S row: アイス, スキー.
6	セ ソ	You can now finish the S row: ソース, シーズー.
7	タ チ ツ	You can now tell シ from ツ: タクシー, ツアー.
8	テ ト	You can now finish the T row: テスト, トースト.
9	ナ ニ ヌ	You can now start the N row: ツナ, テニス.
10	ネ ノ	You can now finish the N row: ノート, ネクタイ.
11	ハ ヒ フ	You can now start the H row: コーヒー, ナイフ.
12	ヘ ホ	You can now finish the H row: ヘア, ホース.
13	マ ミ ム	You can now start the M row: マスク, マイク.

CHAPTER	NEW CHARACTERS	YOU CAN NOW...
14	メ モ	You can now finish the M row: アニメ, メキシコ.
15	ヤ ュ ヨ	You can now read the Y row: タイヤ, ヨーヨー.
16	ラ リ ル	You can now start the R row: カメラ, アメリカ.
17	レ ロ	You can now finish the R row: カレー, トイレ.
18	ワ ヲ ン	You can now read ワイン, ラーメン and the rest.

What Next?

Not yet covered, and the subject of **Katakana 2**: the voiced marks ゝ and ゞ (ガ パ ビ ズ ...) that give you ビール, テレビ and スーパー; the small ッ; combined sounds such as キャ and シュ; and the extra foreign sounds like ティ and ファ. After that you can start on the Japanese Basic Conversation courses with a full set of kana behind you.