

JP

KATAKANA

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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	auī	<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).