

JP

KATAKANA

Katakana 1 · Chapter 2 · Vowel Row

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 **e**levator 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 **o**ar 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.

abc

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)	a three-beat drill

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 — れんしゅう

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).