

JP

KATAKANA

Katakana 1 · Chapter 5 · Sa Shi Su

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🌿 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**ailboat: 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 — 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.