

Absolute Beginner's Guide to Hiragana
(With an Introduction to Grammar and Kanji)

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First Edition

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To Mandy, editor extraordinaire, almost outdone by Hideto

Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, 'Certainly I can!' Then get busy and find out how to do it.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858 - 1919)



Temple interior, Kawagoe

Table of Contents

The Hiragana Chart.....	8
Introduction.....	9
Row 1: Lessons 1-5 あ い う え お (<i>a i u e o</i>).....	17
Grammar Corner: Describing Things (It's/It's a...).....	25
Grammar Corner: Basic Features of a Japanese Sentence.....	27
First Kanji: Introduction Part (I)	28
Row 2: Lessons 6-10 か き く け こ (<i>ka ki ku ke ko</i>).....	29
Grammar Corner: Describing Things (Question Form).....	34
Grammar Corner: Describing Things (A is B)	36
First Kanji: Introduction Part (II)	41
Row 3: Lessons 11-15 さ し す せ そ (<i>sa shi su se so</i>).....	43
Grammar Corner: Here, There, and Over There	48
Grammar Corner: This, That, and That Over There	50
First Kanji: Introduction Part (III)	55
Row 4: Lessons 16-20 た ち つ て と (<i>ta chi tsu te to</i>).....	57
Grammar Corner: More Question Forms (Where is...).....	63
Grammar Corner: More Question Forms (What's that?)	65
First Kanji: 一 (<i>ichi</i>)	68
Row 5: Lessons 21-25 な に ぬ ね の (<i>na ni nu ne no</i>).....	71
Grammar Corner: Use of Names	73
Grammar Corner: Adjectives (い Form)	79
First Kanji: 七 (<i>shichi</i>).....	82
Midway Review.....	85
Long Vowel Recap	88
Row 6: Lessons 26-30 は ひ ふ へ ほ (<i>ha hi fu he ho</i>).....	89
Grammar Corner: Adjectives (な Form)	95
Grammar Corner: Yes and No.....	99
First Kanji: 丁 (<i>chō</i>).....	102
Row 7: Lessons 31-3 ま み む め も (<i>ma mi mu me mo</i>).....	105
Grammar Corner: Nouns as Adjectives	107
Grammar Corner: Practice with Adjectives	111
First Kanji: 九 (<i>kyū</i>)	116
Row 8: Lessons 36-38 や ゆ よ (<i>ya yu yo</i>).....	119
Grammar Corner: Some Everyday Verbs	123

Grammar Corner: Verbs, Objects, and The Particle を.....	125
First Kanji: 二 (ni).....	126
Row 9: Lessons 39-43 ら り る れ ろ (ra ri ru re ro).....	129
Grammar Corner: Verbs, Objects, and Subjects.....	131
Grammar Corner: Destinations (The Particle 〜).....	135
First Kanji: 人 (jin).....	140
Row 10: Lessons 44-45 わ を (wa wo).....	143
Grammar Corner: Useful Phrases.....	145
Row 11: Lesson 46 ん(n).....	149
Final Review.....	153
Answers.....	160
Appendix A: Hiragana Flashcards.....	163
Appendix B: Vocabulary Flashcards	171



May your Japanese improve beyond this level of English...

The Hiragana Chart

ひらがな表

あ	い	う	え	お
か	き	く	け	こ
さ	し	す	せ	そ
た	ち	つ	て	と
な	に	ぬ	ね	の
は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
ま	み	む	め	も
や		ゆ		よ
ら	り	る	れ	ろ
わ				を
ん				

Introduction

Thinking back to my first few years in the country, I remember vividly an interview I had with the dean of a foreign language institute in Osaka. The man was originally from Scotland, but had been in Japan for the better part of a decade. He was married to a Japanese woman, and spoke Japanese quite fluently. Yet despite his extended stay, he remained illiterate and still required even the simplest day-to-day documents to be translated for him by his staff. “How sad,” I thought, and how inconvenient. I could just imagine the difficulties of trying to navigate the train system, particularly outside the big cities, or of filling out the forms required to open a bank account, sign up for a mobile phone service, or rent an apartment.

In a way, his predicament was perfectly understandable. Of the tens of thousands of visitors to Japan, how many actually make the effort to tackle the written language? To be fair, the challenge can seem daunting: the hiragana syllabary, which represents the bottom rung of the ladder, consists of at least 46 basic symbols and score of derivatives. The same is true of katakana, and when we come to kanji, the ideograms that make up the core of the language, we’re faced with memorizing about 2,000 characters and at least as many compounds if we want to reach even high-school level literacy.

Yet many *do* manage to attain this level of mastery, or even beyond. Each year, the national Japanese Language Proficiency Test, the benchmark for language learning, is held at centers throughout the country. Hundreds come to try for a certificate, sitting tests held completely in Japanese, even at the lowest levels. Some do it for the prestige and job opportunities, but I suspect that most just want the satisfaction of knowing that they have progressed beyond the fumbling, Japanese-English bar conversation stage, and are on their way to real independence and cultural immersion.

I did it. After six years or so of piecemeal study while teaching English I decided to buckle down get ready for the examinations. Taking one a year, I finished with the highest certificate after four years. Along the way, I turned my hobby into a vocation by finding a translation agency willing to hire me, despite my “intermediate” ability. Years later, I still earn a living as a translator, though now from outside Japan. My customer base is worldwide, and I’m rarely without work, which arrives on a regular basis by email (have laptop will travel!)

As another example, a friend came to Japan with no knowledge of the language, and after a year’s immersion course was accepted at Kyoto University, one of the most prestigious in the country. Writing all his essays and exams in Japanese, he completed an undergraduate degree in psychology, and then moonlighting as a translator, went on to continue his education in graduate school – not bad for an ordinary kid from the Philippines!

Of course, there is no such thing as a leap into literacy – like everything else worth doing, written Japanese is best tackled in manageable stages. And stage I is mastery of hiragana.

Hiragana: An Overview

What exactly is hiragana? *Hiragana* is a symbol system that together with *katakana*, *kanji* ideograms, and *romaji* (characters from the western alphabet) forms the basis for contemporary Japanese.

Where did it come from? Early in Japanese history, a subset of Chinese kanji was adopted as shorthand for specific sounds. Hiragana evolved as a simplification of these characters at the start of the Heian period (794 to 1185 AD). The system proved to be a godsend for women in the aristocracy, who might otherwise have remained illiterate. (An education in kanji was considered suitable only for men.) Hiragana eventually became popular with writers of both sexes, and continued to evolve until recent times. The current table of characters, known as the *gojūon* was standardized by the Japanese government around the middle of the 20th century.

What is it used for? Hiragana has a number of uses in contemporary Japanese:

- I) Hiragana is the first writing system taught to children, because it is simpler than kanji, and it corresponds to the sounds they already know. Many kid's books are written entirely in hiragana.
- II) In everyday text, hiragana is used to write very short words that either lack kanji, or have only difficult, antiquated kanji. Examples include これ (*kore*) meaning “this” and まで (*made*) meaning “until”. (See below.)
- III) Hiragana is used for writing the grammar elements that hold sentences together. Examples include the particles を (*o*) and は (*wa*), which indicate direct objects and subjects respectively, and *okurigana*, suffixes added to kanji to indicate pronunciation and tense¹.

Points II and III can be illustrated with a simple sentence:

これは新しいボール・ペンです

kore wa atarashii bōrupen desu → This is a new ball pen.

The hiragana characters have been underlined. The phrase これは (*kore wa*)

¹ For a discussion of particles, see the Grammar Corners “Describing Things (A is B)” (pg. 36) and “Verbs, Objects, and the Particle を” (pg. 125).

Table 1 The Basic Hiragana Chart

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Row 1: the <i>a</i> row	あ <i>a</i>	い <i>i</i>	う <i>u</i>	え <i>e</i>	お <i>o</i>
Row 2: the <i>ka</i> row	か <i>ka</i>	き <i>ki</i>	く <i>ku</i>	け <i>ke</i>	こ <i>ko</i>
Row 3 the <i>sa</i> row	さ <i>sa</i>	し <i>shi</i>	す <i>su</i>	せ <i>se</i>	そ <i>so</i>
Row 4 the <i>ta</i> row	た <i>ta</i>	ち <i>chi</i>	つ <i>tsu</i>	て <i>te</i>	と <i>to</i>
Row 5 the <i>na</i> row	な <i>na</i>	に <i>ni</i>	ぬ <i>nu</i>	ね <i>ne</i>	の <i>no</i>
Row 6 the <i>ha</i> row	は <i>ha</i>	ひ <i>hi</i>	ふ <i>fu</i>	へ <i>he</i>	ほ <i>ho</i>
Row 7 the <i>ma</i> row	ま <i>ma</i>	み <i>mi</i>	む <i>mu</i>	め <i>me</i>	も <i>mo</i>
Row 8 the <i>ya</i> row	や <i>ya</i>		ゆ <i>yu</i>		よ <i>yo</i>
Row 9 the <i>ra</i> row	ら <i>ra</i>	り <i>ri</i>	る <i>ru</i>	れ <i>re</i>	ろ <i>ro</i>
Row 10 the <i>wa</i> row	わ <i>wa</i>				を <i>wo</i>
Row 11 the <i>n</i> row	ん <i>n</i>				

means roughly “this”. The combination of the kanji 新 and hiragana しい forms the adjective 新しい (*atarashii*) meaning “new”. The phrase です (*desu*) is similar in meaning to “is”. Note that *bōrupen* or “ball-pen” is a loan word from English. It is written in katakana rather than hiragana, which is the convention for words of foreign origin.

- IV) Hiragana characters are used for writing informal or slangy words and phrases from everyday speech. e.g. びしゃびしゃ (*bisha bisha*) →soaking wet

e.g. いいんじゃない (*iinjanai*) →not bad/pretty good

- V) Hiragana is also written above or beside difficult kanji (especially in newspapers and *manga*), to help the reader with the pronunciation. In this form, the characters are called *furigana*.

e.g. The kanji compound 聴衆 (audience) plus furigana looks like 聴衆^{ちようしゅう}. The tiny hiragana above the kanji are ちよう (*chō*) and しゅう (*shū*).

What does it look like? The standard romanization of the hiragana chart is shown in Table 1. You can see that the symbols are organized into 11 rows and 5 columns. Gaps represent antiquated or unused hiragana, leaving us a total of 46 basic characters to memorize. There are also a number of additional symbols derived from the 46. Each of these will be introduced in the context of the basic character from which they are derived. (As you will learn, some of the 46 characters have no derivatives, some have a few, and some have considerably more.) The complete set of basic and derived characters is shown in Appendix A.

What does it sound like? There are five core hiragana characters, which correspond closely to the vowels in English. They are written along the first row of the chart:

あ = *a* pronounced like the letter a in “alive” or “aha” (“ah” sound)

い = *i* pronounced like the letter e in “evil” or the ee in “greed” (“ee” sound)

う = *u* pronounced like the letter u in “rude” or oo in “root” (“ew” sound)

え = *e* pronounced like the ae in “aerial” or the e in “kept” (“eh” sound)

お = *o* pronounced like the o in “mole” or “nose” (“oh” sound)

All of the rest of the characters and their derivatives consist of one or more consonants + one of these vowel sounds.

e.g. さ (*sa*); つ (*tsu*); け (*ke*); みゃ (*mya*)²

² This is a derivative of み, pronounced “myah”, not “miiyahh”

There are a couple of exceptions to the “consonant + vowel” rule, and these are found near the bottom of the chart: i) The character を (written *wo* or *o*) (row 10, column 5) is pronounced the same as the vowel お (*o*); ii) the character ん (*n*) (row 11, column 1) is the one lonely “consonant” in hiragana, and is pronounced as a nasally “n” or “ng”.

In most cases, each character is associated with only one sound. This is not true however for the hiragana は (row 6, column 1) and へ (row 6, column 4), which have several pronunciations depending on context. This will be explained more fully in the individual lessons.

What about the sounds in combination? Hiragana differs from English in that there is much less “blurring” of sounds. Pity the poor student of English who may have mastered the letters “o”, “e”, and “u” but is at a loss when faced with vocabulary like “oeuvre”. Fortunately for the Japanese learner, such headaches are rare. In fact, the distinct readings of the individual characters are pretty much retained in longer sequences:

e.g. Taking ひ (*hi*), ら (*ra*), が (*ga*), and な (*na*), and stringing them together gives us ひらがな, a combination pronounced “hi” + “ra” + “ga” + “na” → *hiragana*
The word “hiragana” is four beats (syllables) long, one for each of the original characters.

e.g. あ (*a*), お (*o*), い (*i*) together is あおい = *a + o + i* → *aoi* or “blue”. The word “aoi” is three beats (syllables) long, one for each of the original characters.

There are a few trickier cases, usually involving long vowels or double consonants:

- I) Long vowels (held for two beats rather than one) are created when the regular vowels (あ *a*; い *i*; う *u*; え *e*; お *o*) follow directly after certain hiragana characters.

Long “ah”: formed when あ (*a*) follows after a character ending with an “ah” sound.
Usually written with a bar (macron) over the “a” (in other words, ā)

e.g. おかあさん *o + ka + a + sa + n* → *okāsan* (“mommy”)

Long “ee”: formed when い (*i*) follows after a character ending with an “ee” sound.
Usually written with a double “i” (in other words, ii)

e.g. あたらしい *a + ta + ra + shi + i* → *atarashii* (new)

Long “ew”: formed when う (*u*) follows after a character ending with an “ew” sound.
Usually written with a macron over the “u” (in other words, ū)
e.g. ぬう *nu + u* → *nū* (to sew)

Long “eh”: formed when い (*i*) follows after a character ending with an “eh” sound.
Usually written as “ei”. (The pronunciation is now similar to the “a” in “made”.)
e.g. せんせい *se + n + se + i* → *sensei* (a teacher)
Another case, involving え (*e*) rather than い (*i*), will be covered in the lesson on え (pg. 24)

Long “oh”: formed when う (*u*) follows after a character ending with an “oh” sound.
Usually written with a macron over the “o” (in other words, ō)
e.g. きのう *ki + no + u* → *kinō* (yesterday)
Another case, involving お (*o*) rather than う (*u*), will be covered in the lesson on お (pg. 26)

- II) Doubled consonants occur when a special character called a *sokuon* (small case *tsu* つ) follows a regular character. The *sokuon* itself is always silent.

As an example, let’s look at two cases involving the characters い (*i*) and と (*to*).
Putting them together in the usual way gives us いと = *i + to* → *ito* (an intention or goal).
Not surprisingly, the word *ito* is two beats long, one per character.

Add a silent *sokuon* between the い and と however and we double the “t” sound in *to*, giving us いっ と or *itto* (a way/course). To pronounce the *tt* correctly, finish the “i” syllable, hold the tongue against the back of the front teeth and let the air build a bit before releasing it in *to*. (Don’t worry – it takes practice!)

Double consonants are usually written as in this example by doubling the letter. There are some special cases:

Double “sh” is usually written “ssh”: し is *shi* but っし is *ssh*i

Double “ch” is usually written “tch”: ち is *chi* but っち is *tchi*

Double “ts” is usually written “tts”: つ is *tsu* but っつ is *ttsu*

Confused? Don’t panic – all of this material will be illustrated as the lessons proceed³.

³ Wikipedia is also recommended for its great overview of hiragana in general, and variations in English transcription in particular. Check the articles entitled “Hiragana”, and “Hepburn Romanization”

Course Structure

The lessons on the 46 basic hiragana characters are grouped by row into short units. Each lesson within a unit follows the same format:

- I) Introduction: the character (in three different fonts); the English equivalent (how it is conventionally written in English); a pronunciation tip; and the position in the chart (row and column)
- II) Stroke order: the written strokes in sequence, with arrows to show the correct direction of pen movement. There are also shaded and blank squares to let you “follow along”. *It is very important to learn the correct strokes and stroke order from the beginning.* This information assists with memorization, and helps lend shape to your penmanship.
- III) Vocabulary: five everyday words in hiragana, with their romaji (Western letter) equivalents, and their meanings
- IV) Practice: a 10-point matching quiz, sometimes drawing on previous lessons. The answers are at the back of the book.
- V) Notes section: extra tips on pronunciation and usage, as well as an overview of any characters derived from the target symbol. A total of 61 derivatives are covered, and it is well worth becoming familiar with them - most are in common use, and are as necessary as the basic 46 hiragana for reading and writing Japanese.

Additional Material: There is no getting around the need to buckle down and learn the abc’s (or *いろは i ro ha* as they are called) if you wish to make any headway with Japanese. But at the same time, hiragana drills can get very boring very quickly. Reflecting on my experience as a language learner, I have decided to take a more integrated approach by introducing introductory grammar and kanji along the way, in the “Grammar Corner” and “First Kanji” sections respectively. Anyone wishing to focus on hiragana exclusively is welcome to leave these sections until the basics of the chart have been covered; I would treat them as a change of pace, and a sampling of the challenges that the language has to offer. (In either case, it’s a good idea to do a bit each day, rather than cramming a number of concepts and getting confused.)

Also in the spirit of variety and motivation, I’ve included as many photographs as possible

from my ten-year stay in cities across Japan. Some of these are the standard picture-postcard views of temples and castles, but others hint at the complex tapestry that is contemporary Japanese culture – the wealth of subcultures and language-learning potential awaiting the adventurous traveler. I hope they serve as a reminder that language study is ultimately about expanding opportunities to communicate and connect.

There are two practice tests as well, one covering the material in the first half of the course, and one the entire contents of the book. You will find the answers for both at the back of the book. And on the subject of review, check out the Long Vowel Recap (pg. 88), and feel free to make use of the two appendices provided. Appendix A summarizes all of the characters (and their derivatives) row by row, while Appendix B collates the 250 vocabulary words from the lessons (in hiragana, romaji, and English). Both sections are designed to be copied, cut out and pasted to create flashcards.

And that's about it. GOOD LUCK and on to lesson one!!



Character in kagura (folk theater) play in Hiroshima

Hiragana ひらがな

Row I: Lessons 1-5 あ い う え お (*a i u e o*)

あ	い	う	え	お
か	き	く	け	こ
さ	し	す	せ	そ
た	ち	つ	て	と
な	に	ぬ	ね	の
は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ
ま	み	む	め	も
や		ゆ		よ
ら	り	る	れ	ろ
わ				を
ん				

Hiragana Row I: Lesson I

あ

Alternate Fonts:

あ あ

English Letter Equivalent: “A”⁴

Pronunciation Tip: (“ah” sound) あ is similar to the first “a” in “aha”, or the “ahhh” sound that the doctor asks you to make (only clipped). あ NEVER sounds like the “ay” in “May”.

Position in Chart (See page 17):

Row 1: あ い う え お (a i u e o)

Column 1: あ か さ た な は ま や ら わ ん (a ka sa ta na ha ma ya ra wa n)

Stroke Order:

				
				
				

⁴ The romaji (English letters) traditionally used, and/or the letters on a bilingual keyboard that are typed to get the character.

Vocabulary:

あした	ありがとう	あね	あおい	あめ
<i>ashita</i>	<i>arigatō</i>	<i>ane</i>	<i>aoi</i>	<i>ame</i>
Tomorrow	Thank you	An older sister ⁵	Blue/green	The rain

Practice:

1. あした
 2. Next character in row
 3. ありがとう
 4. An older sister
 5. Number of strokes
 6. あね
 7. あおい
 8. First character in row
 9. Last character in column
 10. あめ
- 
- a. Three
 - b. Tomorrow
 - c. あね
 - d. The rain
 - e. Thank you
 - f. An older sister
 - g. ん (*n*)
 - h. あ (*a*)
 - i. Blue/green
 - j. い (*i*)

Notes: Long Vowels Revisited

Adding an あ after a rhyming character such as か (*ka*), さ (*sa*), た (*ta*) and so on (see Appendix A) will double the "ah" sound to two beats. In such cases, the long "ah" is usually represented with a macron as ā.

e.g. さあ = sa + a → sā exclamation meaning (for example) "come on!"

In practice, the long "ah" is very uncommon in contemporary Japanese. And ironically, the best example from everyday speech is a special case that uses a hyphen rather than the character あ to extend the sound:

らーめん = ra + me + n → rāmen noodles

⁵ In Japanese, there is basically no distinction between singular and plural nouns. For consistency however, the articles "a", "an", or "the" are added to nouns throughout this book.

Hiragana Row I: Lesson 2

い

Alternate Fonts:

い い

English Letter Equivalent: “I”

Pronunciation Tip: (“ee” sound) Think of “ea” as in “eagle”, or “ee” as in “keep”.

Position in Chart (See page 17):

Row 1: あ (い) う え お (a i u e o)

Column 2: (い) き し ち に ひ み り (i ki shi chi ni hi mi ri)

Stroke Order:

し	し			
い	い			

Vocabulary:

いま	いもうと	いちばん	いっしょ	いしゃ
<i>ima</i>	<i>imōto</i>	<i>ichiban</i>	<i>issho</i>	<i>isha</i>
Today	A younger sister	First; No. 1	Together	A doctor

Practice:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. いっしょ | → | a. A doctor |
| 2. いしゃ | | b. A younger sister |
| 3. First character in row | | c. あ (<i>a</i>) |
| 4. Last character in row | | d. ひ (<i>hi</i>) |
| 5. いもうと | | e. <i>ane</i> |
| 6. Rhymes with character | | f. <i>ima</i> |
| 7. Blue/green | | g. お (<i>o</i>) |
| 8. An older sister | | h. Together |
| 9. Now | | i. あした |
| 10. Tomorrow | | j. あおい |

Notes: Long Vowels

An い is added after a variety of other characters to double the vowel sound to two beats:

I) Long “ee”: formed by adding い after characters ending in an “ee” sound (き *ki*, し *shi* etc. from column 2). The long “ee” is usually written as *ii*

e.g. きびしい *ki + bi + shi + i* → *kibishii* (harsh)

II) Long “eh”: formed by adding い after characters ending in an “eh” sound (け *ke*, せ *se* etc. from column 4). The long “eh” is usually written as *ei*

e.g. せいふ *se + i + fu* → *seifu* (the government)

Notes: Derivatives

The word いっしょ (*issho*) in the vocabulary section contains the derivative character しょ (*sho*), which is formed by fusing the standard characters し (*shi*) and よ (*yo*). Note that よ is written in small case, to distinguish the one-syllable derivative しょ from the ordinary two-syllable pairing of しょ = *shi + yo* → *shiyo* (specifications).

Notes: Double Consonants

The word いっしょ (*issho*) also happens to be an example of a double consonant. Here, the silent, small case つ *tsu* (called a *sokuon*) between the い (*i*) and しょ (*sho*) extends the “sh” sound to two beats. To make the sound properly, focus on the “sh” and draw it out a bit. Note that *issho* differs from いしょ = *i + sho* → *isho* (a will and testament). Be sure to pronounce them distinctly.

Hiragana Row I: Lesson 3

う

Alternate Fonts:

う う

English Letter Equivalent: “U”

Pronunciation Tip: (“ew” sound) Think of “oo” as in “tool”, or “u” as in “rule”.

Position in Chart (See page 17):

Row 1: あ い う え お (a i u e o)

Column 3: う く す つ ぬ ふ む ゆ る (u ku su tsu nu fu mu yu ru)

Stroke Order:

Vocabulary:

うまれる	うたう	うすい	うる	うつくしい
<i>umareru</i>	<i>utau</i>	<i>usui</i>	<i>uru</i>	<i>utsukushii</i>
To be born	To sing	Thin (adj)	To sell	Beautiful

Practice:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Beautiful | a. No. 1 |
| 2. To sell | b. いっしょ |
| 3. First character in row | c. うつくしい |
| 4. Next character after う in row | d. うる |
| 5. Next character in column | e. え (e) |
| 6. <i>usui</i> | f. く (ku) |
| 7. <i>issho</i> | g. Thin |
| 8. あした | h. <i>aoi</i> |
| 9. Blue/green | i. Tomorrow |
| 10. いちばん | j. あ (a) |

Notes: Long Vowels

An う is added after a variety of other characters to double the vowel sound to two beats:

- I) Long “ew”: formed by adding う after characters ending in an “ew” sound (く *ku*, す *su* etc. from column 3). The long “ew” is usually written as *ū*. e.g. ぬう *nu + u* → *nū* (to sew)
- II) Long “oh”: formed by adding う after characters ending in an “oh” sound (こ *ko*, そ *so* etc. from column 5). Usually written as *ō*. e.g. そうじ *so + u + ji* → *sōji* (cleaning)



Right-Wing Activists at Yasukuni Shrine, Tokyo

Hiragana Row I: Lesson 4

え

Alternate Fonts:

え え

English Letter Equivalent: “E”

Pronunciation Tip: (“eh” sound) Think of “e” as in “kept” or “metro”.

Position in Chart (See page 17):

Row 1: あ い う え お (a i u e o)

Column 4: え け せ て ね へ め れ (e ke se te ne he me re)

Stroke Order:

				
				

Vocabulary:

えき	えいが	えん	え	えんぴつ
<i>eki</i>	<i>eiga</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>enpitsu</i>
A train station	A motion picture	Yen (currency)	A drawing	A pencil

Practice:

1. えんぴつ
2. Last character in row
3. Japanese yen
4. *eiga*
5. Rhymes with this character
6. To sing
7. A doctor _ しゃ
8. First character in row
9. Together
10. A younger sister

- a. A motion picture
- b. えん
- c. お (*o*)
- d. あ (*a*)
- e. いっしょ
- f. *imoto*
- g. い (*i*)
- h. *utau*
- i. め (*me*)
- j. A pencil

Notes: Long Vowels

え is occasionally added after characters in column 4 (け *ke*, せ *se*, て *te* etc.) to double the “eh” sound to two beats. e.g. おねえさん *o + ne + e + sa + n* → *onēsan* (casual term meaning “a young lady”).

This combination is quite rare in contemporary Japanese. It is far more common to see the “eh” sound lengthened by an い (*i*) as in せいと *se + i + to* → *seito* (a student)



Grammar Corner:

Describing things (It's a.../It's...)

Let's begin our look at Japanese grammar with one of the simplest sentence patterns: ____です (or ____*desu* in romaji). Here, *desu* means roughly “is”, “it’s” or “it’s a”, and the blank is filled in with a noun or adjective. Note (1) the word order is backwards compared to English; (2) spaces are not used between words in Japanese; and (3) *desu* is typically pronounced as a single syllable (“des”), especially by men.

e.g. ほんです (*hon desu*) ほん= book, です = is → “book is” or “It’s a book.”

e.g. ボールペンです (*bōrupen desu*) → It’s a ball pen.

e.g. おもしろいです (*omoshiroi desu*) → It's interesting.

e.g. さむいです (*samui desu*) → It’s chilly.

e.g. はやいです (*hayai desu*) → It’s fast.

e.g. あかいです (*akai desu*) → It’s red.

Hiragana Row I: Lesson 5

お

Alternate Fonts:

おお

English Letter Equivalent: “O”

Pronunciation Tip: (“oh” sound) Think of “oa” as in “coat”, or “o” as in “hope”.

Position in Chart (See page 17):

Row 1: あ い う え お (a i u e o)

Column 5: お こ そ の ほ も よ ろ を (o ko so to no ho mo yo ro o)

Stroke Order:

お	お			
お	お			

Vocabulary:

おかね	おそく	おじ	おや	おんせん
<i>okane</i>	<i>osoku</i>	<i>oji</i>	<i>oya</i>	<i>onsen</i>
Money	Slowly	An uncle	A parent	A Japanese bath

Practice:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. A parent | a. An uncle |
| 2. Rhyming character | b. おそく |
| 3. A Japanese bath | c. Train station |
| 4. <i>oji</i> | d. と (<i>to</i>) |
| 5. Slowly | e. <i>onsen</i> |
| 6. First character in row | f. <i>ame</i> |
| 7. <i>enpitsu</i> | g. A motion picture |
| 8. えいが | h. A pencil |
| 9. あめ | i. あ (<i>a</i>) |
| 10. えき | j. おや |

Notes: Long Vowels

お can be added after characters in column 5 (こ *ko*, そ *so* and so on) to lengthen the “oh” sound to two beats. e.g. おおさか = o + o + *sa* + *ka* → *ōsaka* (Osaka City). More often, the long “oh” is formed using う (*u*). e.g. ほうほう = ho + u + ho + u → *hōhō* (a method).



Grammar Corner:

Basic Features of a Japanese Sentence

Let's examine the elementary sentence (____です or ____*desu*) in more detail.

I) Word Order: English follows what is called an SVO form (Subject then Verb then Object). If you think of a basic sentence such as “I throw the ball”, “I” is the subject, “throw” is the verb, and “the ball” is the object. Japanese grammar however is SOV (Subject then Object then Verb). In other words, “I the ball throw”! This is why です *desu* comes after the noun or adjective in the previous examples: since the copula です acts like the verb “to be” it is the last thing in the sentence (SOV form).

II) No Spaces: The lack of spaces between words can be a real challenge, particularly if the sentence is written completely in hiragana. In practice, only elementary school children and foreign language learners communicate this way. Adults write many words in kanji, which breaks up the flow and makes the sentence much easier to parse. Going back to the earlier example, compare ほんです and 本です, which are both read as *hon desu* (it's a book).