

LESSON NOTES

How to Write in Japanese: Hiragana and Katakana #1

The Hiragana Vowels

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VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English	Class
あい	あい	ai	love	
いいえ。	いいえ。	lie.	No.	expression
あお	あお	ao	blue	
うえ	うえ	ue	up	

SAMPLE SENTENCES

A:これ、すきですか。B:いいえ。きらいです。

A:*Kore, suki desu ka.* B:*lie. Kirai desu.*

A: Do you like this? B:No. I dislike it.

GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is Mastering the Hiragana Vowels

Written Japanese uses three different scripts: *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*.

Hiragana is the basic Japanese alphabet. Contrary to the English alphabet however, each character represents one syllable sound. So every time you see one specific character, you'll know that it will always sound the same way. The second script used in Japanese is *Katakana*. Each *Katakana* character represents the same syllable as its *Hiragana* counterpart. However, it is written a bit differently and is used mostly for foreign words.

These two make up the Japanese alphabet and they will be the focus of this series.

On the other hand, *Kanji* characters represent a word or a concept. And unlike *Hiragana* and *Katakana*, there are thousands of them. Plus! There are also different readings for each of them.

This makes *Kanji* characters harder to master. However, it's important to learn them as well because they're essential in understanding Japanese.

Introduction to Hiragana and The Hiragana Vowels あ,い,う,え,お

Hiragana characters are the most common of the three scripts because it's used to write functional words like grammatical particles and are also commonly found at the end of adjectives and verbs. There are also a lot of words that are more commonly written in *Hiragana* rather than *Kanji*. Technically, *Hiragana* characters could also be used to substitute *Kanji* characters that you don't know how to write. But don't use this as an excuse not to learn *Kanji*!

There are **46 Hiragana characters**.

These first five characters are the five vowel sounds in Japanese. The rest of the characters are made up of a consonant sound and one of these vowel sounds - except for the ん character.

あ (a)

Hiragana あ is written in 3 strokes.

The first stroke is a horizontal stroke from left to right. Even though horizontal lines look totally flat in fonts, try writing them at a bit of an angle to make your writing look good. The second stroke is a vertical stroke that cuts the first stroke in half. It starts at the top, and curves outwards and down to the bottom. The third stroke is like a spiral. It starts from the center and curves down to the left. Then it curves back up and to the right, crossing the starting point before finally going back down. Flick your pen at the end of this last stroke. To have a good balance, make sure that there isn't too much space in between the 1st and 3rd stroke. Take note of the spaces made by the third stroke as well. This space should be the smallest, then this loop is a bit larger, and finally the space inside the flip is the largest.

い (i)

Hiragana い is written in 2 strokes.

The first stroke starts from this part. It's like a curved diagonal line. At the bottom it turns sharply upwards. Flick your pen while you finish this stroke. This kind of flicked release with a sharp turn is called a *hane*. When you do a *hane*, don't put away your pen immediately. It should be as if you're connecting this stroke to the next one.

The second stroke starts from here. It's actually about where you stop to turn if you haven't released your pen from the earlier stroke. Just draw an opposite curving line from the first stroke without the *hane* part. As you can see, this stroke should be shorter than the first one.

It should look like you are enclosing a circle when writing an い.

う (u)

Hiragana う is written in 2 strokes.

First, draw this short slanted line at the top center. For the second stroke, draw an ear shape starting from this point, curving up to the right and then down to the bottom center. Flick your pen at the end of this stroke. Make sure the first stroke is not too big so that your character won't be off-balance.

え (e)

Hiragana え is written in 2 strokes.

It starts just like the hiragana *ゝ* with a short slanted line on the top center. The second stroke goes like this. Look complicated? Just think of writing a number 7, then go back, retrace a bit then make a small wave. Extend the end of the stroke but don't flick your pen. Try your best to keep the same line during the retracing part. This will make your writing neat.

お (o)

Hiragana お is written in 3 strokes.

It starts in a similar way to Hiragana *あ* with a short horizontal line, but this time is a bit lower and more to the left. The second stroke starts as a vertical line that cuts the first stroke in half. Then it turns sharply to the left, then turns again to make a big curved line. Flick your pen at the end of this stroke. The third stroke is a small slanted line. It should be located a bit to the top right of the first stroke. The left side of your Hiragana *お* should be aligned. Keep the proportions of these spaces as well to keep a good balance. Ok, let's see it again.