

Hiragana ひらがな

the 46 basics · picture it, say it

あ a A sword stabbing an apple: ah!	い i Two sticks side by side, like a double i	う u A sideways U wearing a little hat	え e An exotic bird with a feather on its head	お o A golfer, and the ball flies off: oh!
か ka A blade and a spark: ka -chow!	き ki A key with two teeth	く ku A bird's open beak: coo -coo	け ke A keg standing next to a stick	こ ko Two coins lying flat, one over the other
さ sa Like き with one bar: a sad face under a cross	し shi A fishing hook: she caught a fish	す su A rope swing that loops once: swoosh	せ se A wide mouth with one fang: say it!	そ so A zig-zag of sew ing thread
た ta The letters t + a squeezed together	ち chi A mirrored 5 with a big cheek	つ tsu One big wave: tsunami	て te An arm reaching out: te means hand	と to A toe with a splinter in it
な na A cross, a dot and a knot: a navy rope	に ni A knee : a leg with two lines beside it	ぬ nu A tangled noodle with a loop at the end	ね ne A curled cat tail: neko means cat	の no One swirl, a 'no entry' sign: no!
は ha A stick and a laughing loop: ha -ha	ひ hi A big grin: hee -hee	ふ fu Mount Fuji with little clouds	へ he A small hill: hey , climb me	ほ ho は with a chimney on top: house
ま ma Two bars and a loop: mama's hand mirror	み mi Looks like 21 tied in a knot: me at 21	む mu A cow's face with a tail: moo	め me An eye with lashes: me means eye (め minus loop)	も mo A fishhook with more worms on it
や ya A yacht with a big sail		ゆ yu A fish swimming your way		よ yo A yo-yo hanging on a string
ら ra A rabbit ear on top of a curl	り ri Two reeds swaying in the wind	る ru A road ending in a loop: route back	れ re Like ね, but the tail kicks out: release	ろ ro る without the loop: an open road
わ wa Like ね, but the tail curls in: waddle				を wo Someone tripping over: whoa! (read o)
ん n A cursive lowercase n	How to use this: learn one row a day. Say the sound, see the picture, write it 5×. Then hunt for it in Kitsumi subtitles. Recognising it in the wild is what makes it stick.			

Add ◌^ˆ or ◌[◦]

が ga	ぎ gi	ぐ gu	げ ge	ご go
ざ za	じ ji	ず zu	ぜ ze	ぞ zo
だ da	ぢ ji	づ zu	で de	ど do
ば ba	び bi	ぶ bu	べ be	ぼ bo
ぱ pa	ぴ pi	ぷ pu	ぺ pe	ぽ po

- Two dots ◌^ˆ make it buzz: k→g, s→z, t→d, h→b. か ka → が ga.
- A circle ◌[◦] makes it pop: h→p only. は ha → ぱ pa.
- Twins: ぢ and づ sound like じ ji and ず zu. You'll mostly see じ and ず.
- Small やゆよ glue on: き ki + や = きゃ kya. One sound, not two.
- Small っ is a pause: it doubles the next consonant. きて = kit-te.
- Particles cheat: は, へ, を as grammar words are read wa, e, o.

Combos: i-column + small やゆよ

きゃ kya	きゅ kyu	きょ kyo
しゃ sha	しゅ shu	しょ sho
ちゃ cha	ちゅ chu	ちょ cho
にゃ nya meow 🐱 (she's a fox)	にゅ nyu	にょ nyo
ひゃ hya	ひゅ hyu	ひょ hyo
みゃ mya	みゅ myu	みょ myo
りゃ rya	りゅ ryu	りょ ryo
ぎゃ gya	ぎゅ gyu	ぎょ gyo
じゃ ja	じゅ ju	じょ jo
びゃ bya	びゅ byu	びょ byo
ぴゃ pya	ぴゅ pyu	ぴょ pyo

Hiragana ひらがな

practice · read it before you peek

How: cover the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the kana out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Level 1 · あ か さ rows

あい ai · love	いえ ie · house	あさ asa · morning	かさ kasa · umbrella	すし sushi · sushi	えき eki · station
-----------------	------------------	---------------------	-----------------------	---------------------	---------------------

Level 2 · + た な は

ねこ neko · cat	いぬ inu · dog	はな hana · flower	ひと hito · person	なつ natsu · summer	さかな sakana · fish
------------------	-----------------	---------------------	---------------------	----------------------	----------------------

Level 3 · + ま や ら わ ん

やま yama · mountain	ゆき yuki · snow	よる yoru · night	くるま kuruma · car	わたし watashi · I, me	ほん hon · book
-----------------------	-------------------	--------------------	---------------------	------------------------	------------------

Level 4 · ° and °

ごはん gohan · meal	かぞく kazoku · family	でんわ denwa · phone	ぶどう budō · grapes	えんぴつ enpitsu · pencil	ひらがな hiragana · hiragana
---------------------	------------------------	----------------------	----------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------

Level 5 · combos and small っ

きょう kyō · today	しゃしん shashin · photo	おちゃ ocha · tea	きって kitte · stamp	りょこう ryokō · trip	ちょっと chotto · a little
--------------------	-------------------------	-------------------	----------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

Read these sentences

- わたしはねこがすきです。
watashi wa neko ga suki desu. — I like cats.
- きょうはあついですね。
kyō wa atsui desu ne. — It's hot today, isn't it?
- ともだちとすしをたべます。
tomodachi to sushi o tabemasu. — I eat sushi with a friend.
- いぬがにわでねています。
inu ga niwa de nete imasu. — The dog is sleeping in the garden.
- あしたやまにいきたいです。
ashita yama ni ikitai desu. — I want to go to the mountains tomorrow.
- このほんはとてもおもしろい。
kono hon wa totemo omoshiroi. — This book is really interesting.
- ちょっとまってください。
chotto matte kudasai. — Please wait a moment.
- まいにちにほんごをべんきょうします。
mainichi nihongo o benkyō shimasu. — I study Japanese every day.

Katakana カタカナ

the 46 basics · picture it, say it

ア a An axe	イ i An easel leaning on a wall	ウ u う with a flat crown: ooh, royal	エ e An elevator shaft, an l-beam	オ o An opera singer, arms wide
カ ka か without its spark: ka	キ ki A key with three teeth	ク ku A cook's hook for hanging pots	ケ ke A letter K that fell over	コ ko A corner of a box
サ sa A saw-horse with a hanging leg	シ shi Dots on the left, stroke rises: she smiles	ス su A person sprinting: Sue runs	セ se Like せ, but simpler: say	ソ so Both strokes fall from the top: so-so
タ ta ク with a stripe inside: a tabby	チ chi A cheerleader holding a baton	ツ tsu Dots on top, stroke falls: tsunami	テ te A telegraph pole	ト to A totem pole with one branch
ナ na A cross: nail it to the wall	ニ ni Two lines, like 二 (ni = two)	ヌ nu Chopsticks crossed over noodles	ネ ne A necktie on a hanger	ノ no Just one stroke. No more.
ハ ha Two legs walking: ha, off we go	ヒ hi The heel of a shoe	フ fu A hook with food on it	ヘ he Same as へ: a little hey hill	ホ ho A holy cross with two legs
マ ma An open beak feeding a chick: mama bird	ミ mi Three lines: me, me, me!	ム mu A moo-cow's nose	メ me An X marks where we meet	モ mo Like も without the hook: a mop
ヤ ya Like や: a yacht sail		ユ yu A U-shaped pipe on its side		ヨ yo A backwards E: yo!
ラ ra A lid over フ: a radio aerial	リ ri Same as り: two reeds	ル ru Two legs, one kicks: kangaroo	レ re A check mark: ready	ロ ro A robot's square head
ワ wa A water jug spout				ヲ wo ワ with an extra bar: whoa (read o)
ン n One dot, stroke rises from below: n	Tip: learn hiragana first. Katakana is the same 46 sounds with sharper, straighter strokes, so most of it comes fast once hiragana does.			

Add ◌^ˆ or ◌^{◌◌}

ガ ga	ギ gi	グ gu	ゲ ge	ゴ go
ザ za	ジ ji	ズ zu	ゼ ze	ゾ zo
ダ da	ヂ ji	ヅ zu	デ de	ド do
バ ba	ビ bi	ブ bu	ベ be	ボ bo
パ pa	ピ ^{◌◌} pi	プ ^{◌◌} pu	ペ pe	ポ ^{◌◌} po

- Same rules as hiragana: ◌^ˆ k→g, s→z, t→d, h→b; ◌^{◌◌} h→p.
- Used for: foreign words, names, brands and sound effects. Anime titles love it.
- stretches a vowel: コーヒー = kōhī, coffee.
- Small ッ is a pause: ベッド = bed-do, bed.
- Extra combos for loanwords: ファ fa, ティ ti, ウィ wi, ヴ vu.
- Look-alike trap: シ shi / ツ tsu, ソ so / ン n. Watch which way the long stroke goes.

Combos: i-column + small ヤ ュ ヨ

キャ kya	キュ kyu	キヨ kyo
シャ sha	シュ shu	シヨ sho
チャ cha	チュ chu	チヨ cho
ニヤ nya meow 🐱 (she's a fox)	ニユ nyu	ニヨ nyo
ヒヤ hya	ヒュ hyu	ヒヨ hyo
ミヤ mya	ミユ myu	ミヨ myo
リヤ rya	リュ ryu	リヨ ryo
ギヤ gya	ギュ gyu	ギヨ gyo
ジャ ja	ジュ ju	ジヨ jo
ビヤ bya	ビュ byu	ビヨ byo
ピヤ pya	ピュ pyu	ピヨ pyo

How: cover the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the kana out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Level 1 · loanwords

アニメ anime · anime	カメラ kamera · camera	テレビ terebi · TV	ホテル hoteru · hotel	バス basu · bus	パン pan · bread
----------------------	------------------------	--------------------	-----------------------	------------------	-------------------

Level 2 · long vowel —

ゲーム gēmu · game	ケーキ kēki · cake	コーヒー kōhī · coffee	ノート nōto · notebook	スーパー sūpā · supermarket	メール mēru · email
--------------------	--------------------	-----------------------	------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------

Level 3 · small ツ ャ ュ ヨ

ベッド beddo · bed	チケット chiketto · ticket	シャツ shatsu · shirt	ジュース jūsu · juice	チョコ choko · chocolate	ニュース nyūsu · news
--------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------------	--------------------------	----------------------

Level 4 · loanword combos

パーティー pāti · party	フォーク fōku · fork	ソファ sofa · sofa	カフェ kafe · café	チェック chekku · check	ティッシュ tisshu · tissue
-----------------------	---------------------	--------------------	--------------------	------------------------	--------------------------

Level 5 · places and names

アメリカ amerika · USA	ウクライナ ukuraina · Ukraine	ドイツ doitsu · Germany	フランス furansu · France	カナダ kanada · Canada	キツミ kitsumi · ?
-----------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	--------------------

Read these sentences

- わたしはアニメがだいすきです。
watashi wa anime ga daisuki desu. — I love anime.
- コンビニでコーヒーをかいました。
konbini de kōhī o kaimashita. — I bought coffee at the convenience store.
- あたらしいゲームをやりたい!
atarashii gēmu o yaritai! — I want to play the new game!
- ケーキとアイスクリーム、どっちがいい?
kēki to aisukurīmu, dotchi ga ii? — Cake or ice cream, which one?
- パーティーはなんじからですか。
pāti wa nanji kara desu ka. — What time does the party start?
- アニメをみてにほんごをおぼえます。
anime o mite nihongo o oboemasu. — I learn Japanese by watching anime.
- スマホでにほんのドラマをみます。
sumaho de nihon no drama o mimasu. — I watch Japanese dramas on my phone.
- キツネはネコじゃありません!
kitsune wa neko ja arimasen! — A fox is not a cat!