Hiragana ひらがな

Oboeru 覚える

Every Japanese sound, each one a full beat and read the same way in every word. Learn this chart and you can say any Japanese word on sight.

The 46 basic kana

	a	i	u	e	o
—	あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o
k	か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko
s	さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so
t	た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to
n	な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no
h	は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho
m	ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo
y	や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo
r	ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro
w	わ wa				を o
n	ん n				

Add two dots, change the sound

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

Two dots ゛ voice the sound; the small circle ゜ turns **h** into **p**.

Small ゃ ゅ ょ squeeze two kana into one beat

きゃ kya	きゅ kyu	きょ kyo	ぎゃ gya	ぎゅ gyu	ぎょ gyo
しゃ sha	しゅ shu	しょ sho	じゃ ja	じゅ ju	じょ jo
ちゃ cha	ちゅ chu	ちょ cho	びゃ bya	びゅ byu	びょ byo
にゃ nya	にゅ nyu	にょ nyo	ぴゃ pya	ぴゅ pyu	ぴょ pyo
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			

The second kana is written small. きや is two beats, きゃ is one.

Three rules that finish the job

Small つ — hold the next sound for one silent beat. き**っ**て *kitte, stamp* · が**っ**こう *gakkou, school*

A second vowel kana doubles the length. う stretches **o** and い stretches **e**: おか**あ**さん *okaasan, mother* · え**い**が *ee-ga, film*

Three kana lie when they act as particles. は = **wa** · へ = **e** · を = **o**

Watch out

Look-alike pairs. あ・お · ぬ・め · は・ほ · れ・わ・ね · る・ろ · さ・き. Write each pair out a few times; staring at them does not work.

ん is its own beat. にほん is ni-ho-n — three beats, not two.

Spelling is honest. Unlike English, a kana never changes its sound, so a new word holds no surprises — and furigana above kanji makes the rest readable too.

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