

REMEMBERING THE KANA

THE HIRAGANA



James W. Heisig

REMEMBERING THE KANA

*A guide to reading and writing the
Japanese syllabaries in 3 hours each*

Part One

HIRAGANA

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Japan Publications Trading Co., Ltd.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of this little book is a simple one: to help you teach yourself to read and write the two Japanese syllabaries, the hiragana and the katakana, in three hours each. By “three hours” is meant three cumulative hours of hard work, not three continuous hours of unbroken study, and certainly not three hours in a classroom with a teacher and other students.

The two parts of the book, set back to back, follow the same method, are laid out in the same format, and share common tables in the middle of the volume. Readers who already know one or the other of the syllabaries completely can pass it over and go directly to the part they wish to learn. If you are a newcomer, you should begin with the course on the hiragana before flipping the book over and tackling the katakana.

The syllabaries are arranged in their “dictionary order,” not in the order in which you will learn them. Following the instructions on each page will send you skipping forwards and backwards as you make your way through each lesson. In LESSONS 3 to 5 of the hiragana course you will be taught a simple way to remember the dictionary order, which is indispensable for consulting Japanese dictionaries.

If you have already learned a few of the hiragana, you might be tempted to chart your own course. Don't. You would be better advised not to use the book at all than to try to guide yourself through the labyrinth of this book. The method builds up step by step, and you will need the principles taught at the earlier stages to follow the directions given later. If you must, rush quickly through the material you already feel comfortable. But rush *through* it, not *over* it.

After each lesson, you will be asked to take a break. This is meant to increase your efficiency and to help you concentrate all your attention on the task at hand for short periods of 30 minutes or less. If you were to do two lessons a day, you could complete the six lessons on the third day. This seems the ideal way to proceed.

In any case, you should begin by reading the INTRODUCTION specific to

the syllabary in question. You will be given instructions at the end how to begin.

When you have finished the book, do not forget to read the PROLOGUE that follows PART TWO. There you will find help with tackling the study of the final hurdle in your study of the Japanese writing system: the kanji.

A WORD ABOUT PRONUNCIATION

Compared with English, Japanese is a “sound-poor” language, and this is reflected in the fact that instead of an “alphabet” of individual vowels and consonants that can be combined in a variety of ways, Japanese uses a syllabary of 45 basic sounds and about 77 derivative sounds formed by the voiced and plosive pronunciations of certain consonants and by diphthongs. The full range of sounds is included in the tables on pages 68 and 69 of PART ONE.

This does not mean that all the sounds of Japanese exist in English, or that the familiar letters of the Roman alphabet refer to precisely the same sound in Japanese that they do in English. The only way to learn how to pronounce Japanese properly is with the aid of a native speaker. In this book pronunciation is only indicated by a rough equivalent to English (or more precisely, General American).

A NOTE ON THE HISTORY AND USE OF THE KANA

Using the hiragana and katakana correctly will require skills that no Western language is equipped to provide you with. These are matters that fall outside the scope of these pages. Still, it is helpful to have a general idea of what is involved and why.

When the Chinese writing system was introduced to Japan around the sixth century CE, there was no native system of writing for it to replace or merge with, and the sounds of the language were quite different from the those the Chinese and Korean settlers were accustomed to. The only solution was to assign each sound a Chinese character, or kanji, to approximate the pronunciation. For several centuries a catalogue of some 970 unmodified Chinese characters, or kanji, were used as phonetic symbols for the 88 syllables then used in the Japanese language.

As early as the middle of the eighth century some of these kanji were given a “rounded” or “common” (hira) form based on brush calligraphy as

“substitutes” (kana) for some of the more widely used Chinese letters. During the early middle ages of Japan’s Heian period (794–1185), a style of writing using only these forms came into use, creating the first phonetic syllabaries with a one-to-one relationship between sound and written form. Initially it was used only by women, but by the early tenth century was recognized as an official way of writing, namely, the hiragana.

Today the hiragana are used for writing indigenous Japanese words, for adding inflections to words written with kanji, and for writing words whose kanji are rare or at least outside the standard lists taught in the schools.

The forms of the katakana also derived from Chinese kanji, but unlike the hiragana they were based less on calligraphic writing than on the extraction of a “part” (kata) of the full kanji to represent particular sounds. These forms were written in a square, blocked style to set them off still more from the hiragana. From the ninth century, the katakana appear in use as a mnemonic device for remembering how to pronounce Buddhist texts written in Chinese. Only much later, in 1900 to be exact, would they be standardized for the writing of foreign loan-words and onomatopoeia. Until the dawn of the computer age, they were also used for telegrams.

To sum up, the written Japanese is made up of three forms:

Kanji. Complex characters originating from Chinese and imported into Japan around the sixth century CE. There are some 80,000 of them in all, but Japan has narrowed their use by introducing a list of “general-use kanji” into the education system. A typical Japanese university graduate will be able to recognize around 3,000 of these Sino-Japanese characters.

Hiragana. One of the two syllabic alphabets or “syllabaries” of Japanese. It is used mainly to write indigenous Japanese words and to inflect words written with kanji.

Katakana. The second of the two syllabaries of Japanese. It is used mainly for foreign names and terms, and for onomatopoeia.

These three written forms coexist in Japanese, and it is not uncommon to find all three in a single phrase. Consider this example of a Japanese phrase that combines kanji (bold type), hiragana (italics) and katakana (normal):

私の名前はマリアです

Watashi no namae wa Maria desu.

My name is Maria.

Obviously, the only way to attain fluency in written Japanese is to learn all three forms of writing. This little book should get you well on your way.

It only remains for me to express my gratitude to the Japan Publications Trading Company for their kindness and support over more than eighteen years of working together. Special thanks are due to Helmut Morsbach and Kurebayashi Kazue, who collaborated in the accompanying course on the katakana that forms PART TWO of the present book. It was their initiative to undertake the project and their devotion that saw it through to the end.

James W. Heisig
1 April 2003

INTRODUCTION TO THE HIRAGANA

The course that follows is intended for self study. It did not grow out of classroom experience and is not intended for classroom use. For one thing, I am not a language instructor. All my students are Japanese, and they knew the hiragana by the first grade or before. I did not absorb myself in research on the Japanese syllabaries, survey existing methods, draft a set of mnemonic techniques, test them out systematically on a group of students, carefully record the results, and only then deliver a completed manuscript to the publishers. But neither did the idea occur to me on my own. The facts of the matter are a lot humbler: I wrote the book on a dare.

A visiting professor who had studied my earlier volumes on *Remembering the Kanji* was having trouble remembering the hiragana and casually tossed the challenge at my feet one evening over a mug of beer: “Why hasn’t anybody figured out an easy way to learn the syllabary?” I didn’t know if anyone had or not, but the next morning I took a sheet of white paper and wrote in large bold letters: LEARN THE HIRAGANA IN 3 HOURS. I set the paper on the corner of my desk and resolved not to publish anything until I was satisfied I had grounds to justify its boast. From the very beginning I was aware that I was up to something outlandish.

Fortunately, the chore turned out to be a lot easier than I had anticipated, and the basic text was completed in a few days. Once you have finished the task yourself, I am confident you will see how really simple the idea behind it is.

But enough of how this book was written. It is time to begin, following the instruction in the box below.

→ GO TO PAGE 51

Part One

HIRAGANA

あ

安 → あ

A

You should now be in the middle of LESSON 1. If you are not, go at once to page 51 and start from the beginning.

The syllable *a* begins with a *dagger*, its “blade” bending to the right so as to flow into the next stroke. Below it a *no-parking sign*. (Note that when の is used as a “piece” of another hiragana, the cross-slash protrudes out the top slightly—a kind of “post” to hang the sign on.)

The sound *a* calls to mind a playful little **otter**, swimming on his back in the middle of a pond whose banks are picketed on all sides by *no-parking signs*. On his tummy are a stack of *daggers*, which he is tossing one by one at the signs, clapping his paws with glee each time he hits a bull’s eye.

二 十 あ

PRONUNCIATION

on | father

あ	あ	あ
あ	あ	あ

あの	ano
あく	aku
あけの	akeno

← 9 → GO TO PAGE 10

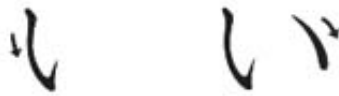
I



い

The roman letter i is drawn with two strokes, one main stroke and a dot to cap it off. So is the hiragana we are going to learn now. The first strokes of the two are almost identical. And just as, when you are writing quickly, the dot on your i often ends off over to the right, so is the second, shorter stroke of the hiragana always set to the right.

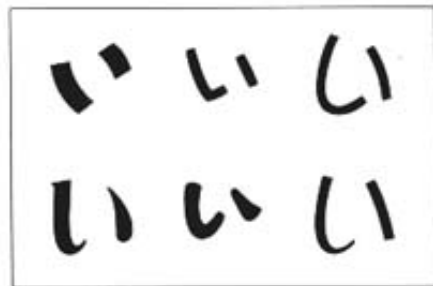
When you practice writing the form, take a pencil and trace over the strokes as they are given below. Almost immediately you should “feel” the flow from the first stroke to the second. After practicing the form once or twice on blocked paper, test yourself on the examples that follow below.



PRONUNCIATION
graffiti | king

ii
in

いい
いん



← 46 → GO TO PAGE 8

う



U

First the pieces. The short first stroke we will take to be a *puppy's tail*. Below that is つ, the incomplete 2 (pronounced, remember, *tsu*).

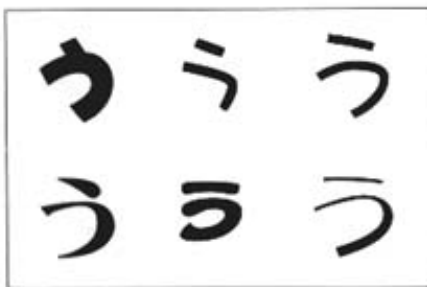
As a word to identify this hiragana, let us think of *two* cities (one German, one Italian) beginning with sounds very close to the vowel sound *u*: **Ulm & Udine**.

If you can remember to let the sound *u* suggest those cities, it is a short hop to the pun that will help you remember this hiragana: a *tail* of 2 (*tsu*) cities.



PRONUNCIATION

Ulm | Udine



うに

uni

うつ

utsu

にあう

niau

← 18 → GO TO PAGE 17

E

衣 → え

え

The pieces for the syllable *e* are a *tail*, a *chalk line*, and the letter *n*. Let the sound suggest an *ape*. And what is our *ape* doing? He has drawn some *chalk lines* on the floor of his cage to make boxes like the ones you are using to practice your hiragana, and is using a *puppy's tail* (attached to the puppy!) to practice brush painting the hiragana *e*.

え

PRONUNCIATION
paint | neigh

en

koeru

hae

えん

こえる

はえ

え え え
え え え

← 20

→ GO TO PAGE 63

お

於 → お

o

This hiragana is not as difficult as it might look, once you isolate the elements that make it up, fix them clearly in an image, and then, keeping that image in mind, let the tip of your pen flow with the natural grace of its form.

The vowel *o* will suggest to us the figure of Old Nick, the devil himself. Unlike usual pictures of the devil, this Old Nick has not one but 2 (*tsu*) tails, each with a sharp *dagger* at the end. Note how he lashes them about menacingly.

ニ お お

PRONUNCIATION

over | foe

お	お	お
お	お	お

おに	oni
おんな	onna
おいけ	oike

← 21 → GO TO PAGE 58

KA

加 → か

か

The *ka* of this hiragana provides the key word, *car*. It is really made of two pieces, one familiar and one new. The *puppy dog's tail*, drawn last, you already know. The part drawn before that is no more than a fancy sort of *dagger*, its hilt is bent and lengthened like the hilt of a *fencing sword*. So you might think of two cars (preferably your own car and a neighbor's) decked out in all the appropriate gear and having a fencing contest.

う か か

PRONUNCIATION

Inca | calm

mannaka

まんなか

mukae

むかえ

kannon

かんのん

か か か
か か か

← 14

→ GO TO PAGE 32

き

幾 → 幾

KI

The only real difference between the first three strokes of this hiragana and the *dagger* is the extra horizontal stroke. The reason is that what we have here is a long, heavy *sword*, which needs a sturdier hilt. Below it is the *hairpin* we just learned. The identifying word is, of course, a key.

Putting it all together: a samurai is bringing his *sword* down (hence the slight angle at which it is drawn) on a *key* resting on a rock, to make a *hairpin* for his beloved. Be sure to pay attention to the great care and skill required for the feat, letting the image play freely for a minute in your mind.

ニ ニ キ キ

PRONUNCIATION

key | lucky

き	き	き
き	き	き

きり	kiri
いき	iki
あき	aki

← 11 → GO TO PAGE 55

KU



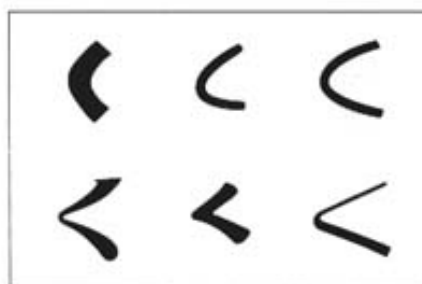
The shape of this next member of the hiragana family is formed exactly like the right side of the infamous computer-game character known as “Pacman.” If you think of the sound it makes munching up the dots on the screen as the **cooing** of a baby, you can actually see the word **coo** in the computer graphics: ☺○○○○○. Whether you find it easier to think of the < as a squared off C or as the mouth of a baby Pacman gulping down little o’s, you shouldn’t have any trouble at all associating this simple shape with its pronunciation.



PRONUNCIATION
cook | coup d’etat

iku
kun
kui

い<
<ん
<い



← 2 → GO TO PAGE 29

け

計 → け

KE

This hiragana is made up of two pieces. On the left, and drawn first, is a single slightly curved shape that looks like a **cape** you might hang on the back of a stick figure. (Draw one see for yourself.)

To the right is a two-stroke shape that resembles a **dagger** with the hilt at the top and the blade below.

The sound *ke* is close enough to the English word **cape** to get us going. Just twist the common phrase “cloak and dagger” into the image of a sinister **cape-and-dagger** figure and the work is done. When you draw the pieces, think of them as images, saying the words to yourself as you go along.

PRONUNCIATION
cape | kangaroo

け	け	け
け	け	け

けい

kei

のけ

noke

けんい

ken'i

← 25 → GO TO PAGE 1

KO



Try drawing a pair of rounded **combs**, the kind a woman might use to bind her hair into a bun. The first two strokes you would begin with (the frame, without the teeth) form the very shape that give us our next hiragana pronounced, conveniently enough, *ko*.

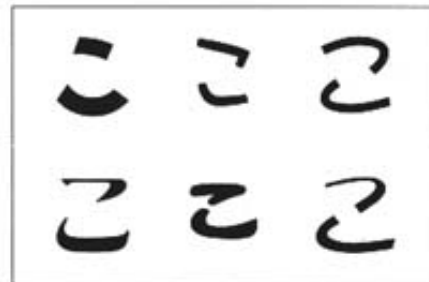
Notice the slight hooking at the end of the first stroke. It is absent in “cleaner,” more modern stylizations of the hiragana and is not absolutely necessary. In any case, you will find that when you write the hiragana for *ko*, the little hook forms itself naturally as your pencil flows from the first stroke to the second.



PRONUNCIATION
comb | rococo

kono
kon
keiko

この
こん
けいこ



← 1 → GO TO PAGE 22

さ

左 → さ

SA

Beneath the familiar *dagger* is the lower half of the component for *comb*. Let us call it a *hairpin* to remember the similarity of form. The key word here is a *sock*, a particularly old and raunchy one that some lady of questionable taste has stuck in her hair using a *dagger* as a *hairpin* to hold it in place.

Note that in nearly all typographical forms, the second and third strokes run together. The more you write the character according to the hand-drawn model above, the more you will acquire a feel for how the two strokes naturally blend into one another.

PRONUNCIATION

samurai | sock

さ	さ	さ
さ	さ	さ

さら

sara

くさい

kusai

けさ

kesa

← 16

→ GO TO PAGE 7

SHI



し

The shape of this hiragana, obviously a *fishhook*, is as easy to remember as its key word, **sheep**. To line the two together, picture yourself angling with a **sheep** dangling at the end of your *fishhook* instead of the customary worm.



PRONUNCIATION
sheep | pushy

shima
anshin
sushi

しま
あんしん
すし



← 63 → GO TO PAGE 35

す



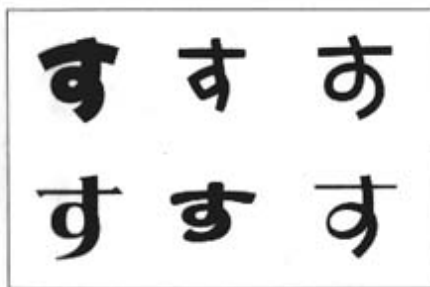
SU

The key word from the syllable *su* will be **soup**. Attached to the *dagger* is a little curl which is in fact a single piece of *macaroni*. (Note how it differs from the *boomerang* by curling downwards and to the left.) All that remains is to imagine yourself at a posh restaurant stabbing at the *macaroni noodles* in your soup with a stiletto. Look! You've got one on the end of your *dagger*!



PRONUNCIATION

soon | suit



りす

risu

すね

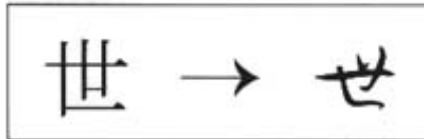
sune

すら

sura

← 24 → GO TO PAGE 33

SE



せ

Se is for seance, a picture of which we will draw with the simple elements that make up his hiragana. First we have *two daggers*, drawn so that their hilts share a common, horizontal line. The last line, extending the blade of the second dagger, is the familiar *chalk line*.

Putting it all together: you draw a *chalk line* circle on the ground and sit in the middle of it. With each hand you drive one of the *daggers* into the *chalk line* and keep a hold of it, thus joining you to the magic circle within which the spirits will reveal themselves. Or some such hocus pocus. The *dagger* to the left is already in the ground; the one on the right is just about to be plunged in.

As we have seen before, the second stroke naturally “hooks” up towards the third, though not in some stylized forms of the hiragana.



PRONUNCIATION
say | wholesale

arimasen

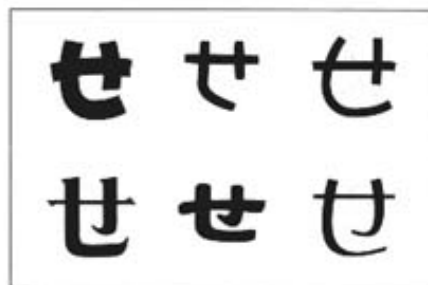
ありません

setsu

せつ

sei

せい



← 36 → GO TO PAGE 6

そ

曾 → 𠂔

SO

The pieces that make up the syllable *so* are a *puppy dog's tail*, a *walking cane*, and the letter *T*. Taking *sew* as our key word, you have only to picture yourself using a *walking cane* as a needle, threading it with a long *tail*, and sewing the monogram *T* on—what else?—a *T* shirt.

Note how the first movement breaks into two strokes in some style of writing, faithful to the kanji on which this hiragana is based (see the frame at the top).

PRONUNCIATION

sew | insole

そ	そ	そ
そ	そ	そ

へそくり

hesokuri

そめる

someru

すそ

suso

← 19 → GO TO PAGE 37

TA

太 → た

た

Before going on to the next paragraph, see if you can recognize the pieces of this hiragana on your own. We learned them back in LESSON 1....

That's right! On the left is the *dagger* and on the right the *comb*. The sound *ta* should suggest the word *top* to you easily enough. Imagine a *top* delicately balanced and spinning around on the point of a *dagger* you are holding in your hand. As the *top* spins, it spits out rounded *combs* like the kind we first pictured when we learned the hiragana こ. The more vividly you "see" yourself ducking the *combs* flying at you, the easier this hiragana will be to remember.

PRONUNCIATION
tatami | top

intai
tako
tachi

いんたい
たこ
たち

← 39

→ GO TO PAGE 11

ち

知 → ち

CHI

Let the identifying word here be **cheese**, probably the first word to come to your mind anyway very convenient for making a good, clear image out of already familiar pieces: the *dagger* and 2. All you need do is imagine yourself drawing out your razor sharp *dagger* from its sheath and slicing yourself a piece of **cheese** with 2 (*tsu*) swift slashes, like a cavalier, culinary Zorro.

ニ ち

PRONUNCIATION

cheetah | handkerchief

ち ち ち

ち ち ち

つち

tsuchi

のち

nochi

ちん

chin

← 3

→ GO TO PAGE 39

TSU



つ

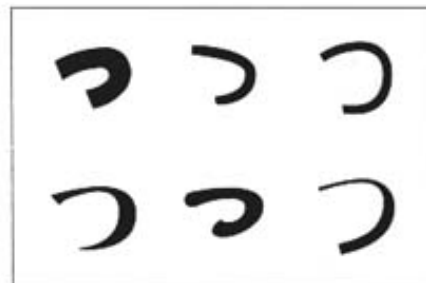
In adapting foreign words to what is basically a sound-poor language, Japanese tries to get as close as it can. For example, the English word “two” ends up being pronounced *tsu*, the very hiragana we will learn now. Just our luck, the shape is exactly like an uncompleted Arabic numeral 2.



PRONUNCIATION
tsunami | it's Ulm

kutsu
koitsu
atsui

くつ
こいつ
あつい



← 40 → GO TO PAGE 3

て

天 → 𐄂

TE

Rather than a phonetic key word, we return to the procedure used at the very beginning and appeal to the alphabet—in this case, the letter *t*. Since you already have a pretty good “feel” by now for the way the hiragana forms flow when you write them, try drawing a capital *T* in two strokes, hiragana style, without lifting your pen off the paper. The form you will end up with is the one we are learning here.

Observe that the vowel we use to pronounce the alphabetic letter *t* in English is different from the vowel in the syllable we are learning here.

て

PRONUNCIATION

tape | taint

て	て	て
て	て	て

よてい

yotei

てんきん

tenkin

さて

sate

← 35 → GO TO PAGE 15

TO



と

Can you see the *walking stick* sticking out of the big *toe* in this form? Obviously the user is not very adept at walking with a *cane* yet! This hiragana should look like a doodle of someone jabbing a walking stick into his or her big *toe*. The only other thing you need to notice is that the *toe* points the opposite direction from the finger we met in the former hiragana.



PRONUNCIATION

toast | toe

tokoton

とことん

hato

はと

toro

とろ



← 37

→ GO TO PAGE 4

な

奈 → な

NA

Clear your mind of everything before you begin this page. It is important that you form a very vivid image now to avoid confusion with the last hiragana we learned.

Let the sound *na* suggest a door **knocker**, one of those eerie gothic figures fixed to the middle of a heavy, oaken front door on a haunted house. See the little *tail* hanging on it? Give it a tug and *daggers* start flying out—a far cry from your usual welcome mat! But you take your distance and take aim with your trusty *boomerang*, throwing it again and again until you manage to break the ghastly contraption.

When you form your image and write the hiragana, you should try to follow the order of the pieces: *dagger . . . tail . . . boomerang*.

ニ ナ ナ な

PRONUNCIATION

knock | not

な な な
な な な

なつ

natsu

はなこ

Hanako

あんな

anna

← 38 → GO TO PAGE 5

NI



に

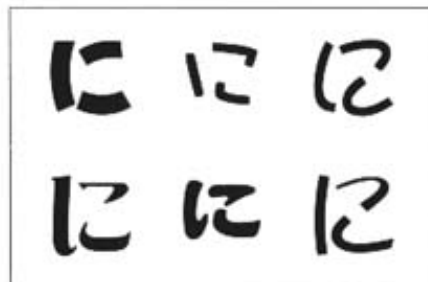
On the right side you see the hiragana we just learned for こ. But here the *combs* are out of the hair and glued firmly on to your **kneecaps**, one on each side, so that when you put your legs together, the teeth of the *combs* interlock and you have a devil of a time getting your legs apart. Now imagine pulling your *cape* around from the back and holding it between your legs to keep the *combs* from linking.

Close your eyes for a few seconds and let the image take shape, focusing first on the **kneecaps** and then on its composite pieces, the two *combs* and the *cloak*. Now open your eyes and look at the hiragana. You should be able to “see” the image before you. The next time you hear the sound *ni*, the whole ludicrous scene should come back to life for you.



PRONUNCIATION
knee | anise

nin	にん
kuni	くに
niko	にこ



← 10 → GO TO PAGE 53

ぬ

奴 → ぬ

NU

This character will take about as long to learn as it takes you to read this short paragraph. The *maypole* has a **nude** statue spinning around on it, tossing *boomerangs* at passersby in the park. The **nude** supplies the key word for the syllable *nu*.

いぬ

PRONUNCIATION

nuclear | annuity

ぬ	ぬ	ぬ
ぬ	ぬ	ぬ

ぬま	numa
いぬ	inu
あけぬ	akenu

← 34 → GO TO PAGE 43

NE

衤 → 糸

ね

Imagine yourself at a tedious academic convention where, to fight off boredom, you and a few colleagues have folded your **nametags** (the *ne* sound) into *boomerangs* in order to coax a swarm of *wasps* down from their nest in the rafters—and perhaps put a little life into the proceedings.

い ね

PRONUNCIATION
nay | neighbor

mane
yone
netsu

まね
よね
ねっ

ね ね ね
ね ね ね

← 42 → GO TO PAGE 13

の

乃 → 乃

NO

The internationally recognized sign for **no** is a circle with a slash running through it: \oslash . The easiest way to draw it with a single stroke is to begin in the upper right, draw the slash, and then bring the circle around. The only other thing you have to remember is that there is **no** closing the circle.

When this hiragana appears as a part of another hiragana (with only a slight alteration of shape), we will take it to mean a **no parking sign**. An example follows later in this lesson.



PRONUNCIATION

no | rhino



への

heno

のんの

nonno

くの

kuno

← 29 → GO TO PAGE 9

HA

波 → 波

は

The key word for the sound *ha* will be the children's game of **hopscotch**. The first part of the character looks exactly like the *cape and dagger* we already met. The tiny loop at the end is a *boomerang*, shown here "looping" its way back to the one who threw it.

Instead of playing **hopscotch** with stones or bottle caps, imagine the sinister *cape-and-dagger* figure using tiny *boomerangs* for tokens and how difficult it is to get them to land on the squares because they keep looping back to him! As you trace through the lines of the shape, say to yourself "*cape . . . dagger . . . boomerang*," and the image and shape will fix themselves together in memory quite easily.

↓ に は

PRONUNCIATION
shop | harlot

hanko

はんこ

hara

はら

haiku

はいく

は は は

は は は

← 58

→ GO TO PAGE 30

ひ

比 → ひ

HI

The key word for this hiragana, **heel**, is nothing more than a doodle of a pair of *handlebars* (drawn into that shape by putting two へ back to back). Instead of wearing spurs on the **heels** of one's boots, would it not be more fitting for modern men and women to wear little motorcycle *handlebars* that snap on the back of the **heels** just the way the spurs used to for the cowboys?



PRONUNCIATION

heap | she

ひ	ひ	ひ
ひ	ひ	ひ

ひも	himo
ひいき	hiiki
ひまわり	himawari

← 65 → GO TO PAGE 36

FU



The key word, **fool**, characterizes someone asked to show how many *puppy tails* there are. He answers 2 (*tsu*), because he doesn't notice the third one on top of his head.

Think of the piece for 2 as “flowing over” into the second *tail* so that you are not tempted to let it swoop downwards (as in the hiragana つ). The curves of the final two *tails* also flow naturally from the order of strokes.



Resist the temptation to learn this hiragana after the simpler model of the typeset character, even if that form seems closer to what you end up with when you write quickly.

PRONUNCIATION

fool | food

funsui

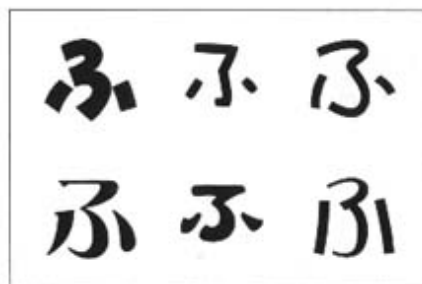
ふんすい

sofu

そふ

hifu

ひふ



← 32

→ GO TO PAGE 45



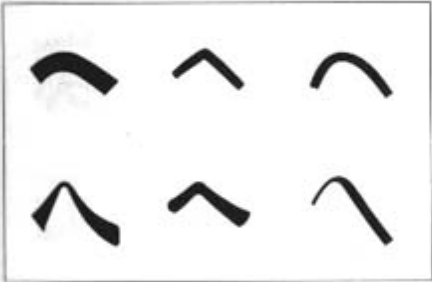
HE

Not forgetting what was said in the INTRODUCTION about the vowels generally being shorter in Japanese than they are in English, you can think of this next hiragana as a small **haystack**, which it rather resembles and which, happily, also provides a link with the sound.



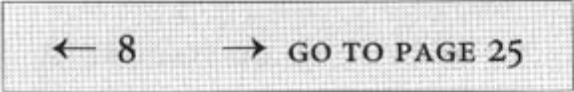
PRONUNCIATION

hay | shame



へん
へい
いへん

hen
hei
ihen



HO

保 → ほ

ほ

The key word **hoe**, a nearly perfect homonym for our next hiragana, is composed of *hopscotch* (which we just learned) with an extra horizontal line at the top. The added line represents in fact the *chalk lines* on the **hopscotch** court.

Only the game is played slightly differently here. You stand with your two feet on a **hoe** and try to jump not between the *chalk lines* but right on them, hopping about as if on a pogo stick, trying to land on the *chalk lines* and kick up the white dust to prove you succeeded.

↓ ↓^二 ↓^三 ほ

PRONUNCIATION

hoe | hoary

hori	ほり
hon	ほん
aho	あほ

ほ	ほ	ほ
ほ	ほ	ほ

← 26 → GO TO PAGE 31

ま

末 → 末

MA

The key word is almost too obvious to mention: **mama**. The elements that make it up are no less obvious. They combine the *sword* and the *boomerang*. The image is not hard, provided you have a distinct picture of **mama** in mind: She is standing in an open field throwing large, heavy *swords* that are bent like *boomerangs* so that they fly back to her. Watch her ducking to avoid getting hit by the things as they whizz by.

一 二 ま

PRONUNCIATION

mama | motley

ま	ま	ま
ま	ま	ま

こま	koma
まつ	matsu
まんじん	mannin

← 30 → GO TO PAGE 38

MI

美 → 美

み

The syllable *mi* easily enough suggests the word **meat** for an identifying key word. If you look closely at the shape of this hiragana, you will notice that it begins with the 7 *dwarfs*, who are throwing *boomerangs* at kangaroos, and then carving them up for steaks with their dwarfish little *daggers*.

み み

PRONUNCIATION
mi | enemy

mikan
nakami
nomimasu

みかん
なかみ
のみます

み み み
み み み

← 6 → GO TO PAGE 28

む

武 → む

MU

Our key word will be **moon**, the bright, full **moon** glistening in the autumn sky—just the right time for a witch’s brew. Under the **moon’s** light, you are boiling a large kettle of soup into which you are tossing *puppy tails* and *hairpins*. You will have to let this image “stew” in your mind a while so that the *soup’s* ingredients take on unforgettable qualities.

The first stroke of *soup* is shortened because it has to compete with other pieces for the available space. The curl at the end turns right, of course, because it has to blend into the element for *hairpin*.

ニ む む

PRONUNCIATION
moon | samurai

む む む
む む む

むり muri
むつ mutsu
こむ komu

← 13 → GO TO PAGE 61

ME

女 → め

め

The hiragana corresponding to the sound *me* will have as its key word **maypole**. And a rather unusual **maypole** it is. Lacking one of their own, the neighborhood kids have stolen a *no-parking sign* and strung up a ball on it. To avoid getting in trouble for their prank, they have draped an old *cape* around the *no-parking sign* to hide it.

い め

PRONUNCIATION
may | inmate

tsume
ame
menko

つめ
あめ
めんこ

め め め
め め め

← 61 → GO TO PAGE 23

も

毛 → も

MO

Let the key word here be **mow**, and the image that of a mighty sword covered with hundreds of tiny *fishhooks*, which you are using to **mow** the weeds on the bottom of your pond—and maybe and catch yourself a few fish in the process.

し も も

PRONUNCIATION

mow | remorse

も も も
も も も

きもの

kimono

もはん

mohan

もちいる

mochiiru

← 12

→ GO TO PAGE 19

YA



や

Let the key word for the syllable *ya* suggest to you your own backyard more specifically a flower bed or garden there. You are kneeling down on the ground, planting *puppy tails* in the soil, pushing them down with your *walking stick* until they are all the same height, exactly one index finger long.

Note how the short vertical stroke we used in the hiragana for *yu* to begin the form for finger is left out here because it would overlap with the *walking stick*.

When you draw this character, rephrase the image verbally by putting the pieces in order: *finger . . . tail . . . walking stick*.



PRONUNCIATION
yacht | cognac

yamato
yakusa
yahari

やまと
やくさ
やはり



← 27

→ GO TO PAGE 14

ゆ

由 → ゆ

YU

Think of the famous U.S. Army poster that reads “Uncle Sam Wants **you**” when you hear the syllable *yu*. Now focus on the finger pointing in your direction and note how the first stroke of this hiragana is a picture of an index finger (a little stubby, I admit) with the lead-in stroke representing the thumb. The final curved line you might think of as a string tied around the finger reminding Uncle Sam not to forget that it is **you** he wants. Note how the string flows in naturally from the previous stroke, winding itself around the finger.

ゆ ゆ

PRONUNCIATION

cure | fury

ゆ ㇿ ㇾ
ゆ ゆ ゆ

あゆ

ayu

ゆらい

yurai

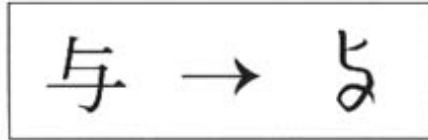
ゆき

yuki

← 15

→ GO TO PAGE 20

YO



よ

The first English word that comes to my mind (and I hope to yours) when I hear the sound *yo* is *yolk*. The pieces we have to work with here are a *puppy dog's tail* and a very, very long *boomerang* (the full vertical stroke is part of it).

To fit these two pieces together, imagine a *boomerang* with one wing considerably longer than the other and a hole drilled in the middle. You stick the *puppy dog's tail* through this hole and tie a knot in it so that it doesn't slip out. You throw the whole contraption into the sky, while a group of people standing around throw egg yolks at the hapless creature.

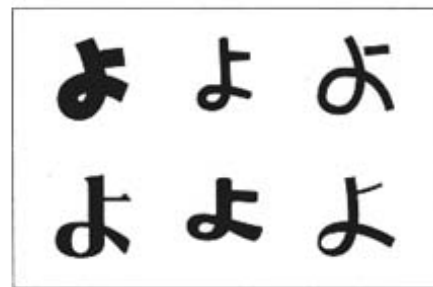
You can "read" the image like this to get the order of the strokes correct: people tossing yolks at puppies flying overhead, their *tails* strung through long *boomerangs*.



PRONUNCIATION
yolk | mayonnaise

yokei
yoko
yon

よけい
よこ
よん



← 31 → GO TO PAGE 21

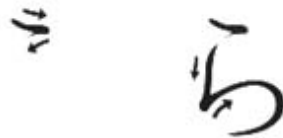
ら

良 → ら

RA

The sound of this hiragana immediately suggests the cheering of a crowd: rah rah rah. The only new piece is the short vertical stroke drawn second. We'll call it just what it looks like: a 1.

Now all you have to do is imagine a mascot puppy leading the cheers by wagging its tail, left and right, while the grandstands echo with the refrain: "1-2 (tsu), rah rah rah. 1-2 (tsu), rah rah rah."



PRONUNCIATION

rocker | rah



へら

hera

らん

ran

へつらう

hetsurau

← 17 → GO TO PAGE 16

RI

利 → り

り

To begin with, let the sound *ri* suggest the figure of the Grim Reaper, the ominous cloaked figure with a long *sickle* slung over his shoulder. The *cloak* you already know. The long stroke to the right is the *sickle* he uses to **reap** his morbid harvest. As you draw the hiragana, say to yourself: “See the Grim Reaper with his *cloak* and l-o-n-g *sickle*.”

Typeset forms of this character often have the two strokes linked together, but it is best to learn it according to the hand-drawn model above. It will help you get the proper “feel” for the natural flow of the hiragana in a way that more stylized variants may not.

PRONUNCIATION

erie | read

riku

りく

heri

へり

nori

のり

← 55

→ GO TO PAGE 18

る

留 → る

RU

The pieces that make up this hiragana should literally jumps out to your eye: *row, row, row your boat* and *boomerang*. The syllable *ru* will take **roof** as our key word. You rip the **roof** off a nearby doghouse, turn it upside down and, using a *boomerang* as your oar, *row, row, row your boat* ever so gently down the stream....

る

PRONUNCIATION

ru e | crew

る る る
る る る

はる

haru

さる

saru

ぬるい

nurui

← 43

→ GO TO PAGE 44

RE

礼 → 禮

れ

The pronunciation of tis hiragana suggests a race, and a most unusual race at that. Rather than compete to find a needle in a *haystack*, the contestants are looking for the 7 *dwarves* hiding in it. Watch the contestants as they come running out of the *haystack*, prize in hand.

Note how the *haystack* naturally hunches upwards because there is not enough space for it to stretch out full length.

レ れ

PRONUNCIATION
rail | crates

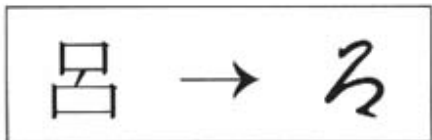
hore
nureta
noren

ほれ
ぬれた
のれん

れ れ れ
れ れ れ

← 44 → GO TO PAGE 24

ろ



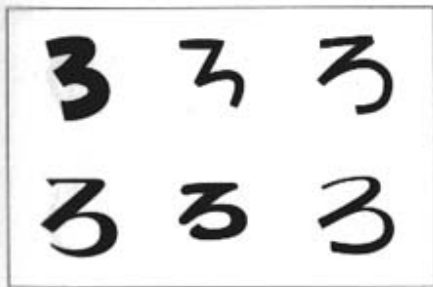
RO

Here we meet the longest key word in the book, for the shortest and simplest of images. If you have never had any trouble remembering that there are 3 row's in "Row, row, row your boat...", you won't have any trouble here either, since the hiragana pronounced *ro* is written with a shape almost exactly the same as the numeral 3.



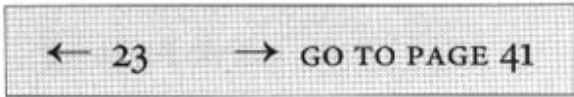
PRONUNCIATION

rotund | petrol

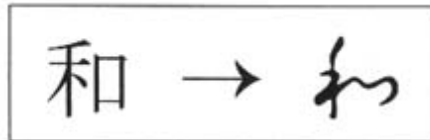


ろく
いろ
ろんこく

roku
iro
ronkoku



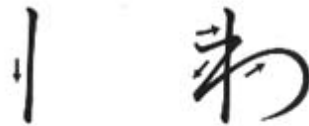
WA



わ

The next three hiragana we will learn combine two pieces, both of them new. The straight vertical line in the first stroke (which does not “bend” or “hook” to one side or the other, as the *cape* does) will be a *walking stick*. The figure 7 drawn next will stand for the 7 *dwarfs*.

The syllabic sound *wa* suggests a wasp, which provides a useful image. As the unsuspecting 7 *dwarfs* hi-ho, hi-ho their way through the forest and up a mountainside, leaning on their *walking sticks* as they go, a gigantic wasp sweeps down and picks 2 (*tsu*) of them up to carry off to its nest. The others start swinging their *walking sticks* at the overgrown insect, beating it furiously until it lets go of their mates.



PRONUNCIATION

wasp | want

wani

わに

awa

あわ

wataru

わたる



← 41

→ GO TO PAGE 42

を

遠 → を

WO

The last of the hiragana (followed in the dictionary order by the very first one we learned) is in some ways the “cutest” of the lot. It might also look to be the most difficult, but as you have surely learned by now, looks can be deceiving. The only strain, if you can call it that, will be to recall the key word: I’m wo.k., you’re wo.k. And the reason that we are both wo.k., as the pop psychologists tell us, is that we treat one another with plenty of *T.L.C.* (“tender loving care”).

Think of the form as a “branding iron” forged into the letters *T.L.C.* Begin by drawing a *T* (crossbar first), let it run into an *L* (slightly drooping downwards in the direction of the drawing), and cross it finally with a *C*. Fire the iron good and hot and then picture yourself branding someone you know with it!

二 有 を

PRONUNCIATION

how old | row over

を を を
を を を

← 28 → GO TO PAGE 47

N

遠 → ㄣ

ん

The first of the hiragana forms we shall learn is also the easiest. It is exactly like the cursive form of the roman letter n (n), except for the longer stem.

In romanized Japanese, whenever this hiragana is followed by a vowel, an apostrophe is added to avoid confusing it with *na*, *ni*, *nu*, *ne*, or *no*. We will see an example of this use of the apostrophe later in this first lesson.

ん

PRONUNCIATION
sing | kung-fu

ん ㄣ ㄣ
ㄣ ㄣ ㄣ

← 53 → GO TO PAGE 2



VOICED MARK

A **voiced mark**, as its name suggests, indicates that a consonant is to be pronounced with the vocal chords vibrating. Think of its two short lines * as a doodle of the vocal chords.

As shown on the tables on pages 68 and 69, when used with sounds in the *ka* row (*ka, ki, ku, ke, ko*), the consonant is read *ga* (giving us *ga, gi, gu, ge, go*). Similarly *sa* becomes *za* (and so forth), *to* becomes *da*, and *ha* becomes *ba*. You should be able to feel the voiced effect vibrating inside your throat. For all practical purposes *じ* and *ぢ* are both pronounced the same (*ji*), just as *ず* and *づ* are both pronounced *zu*. A number of examples are given below.

zange	ざんげ	dobu	どぶ
zen	ぜん	giji	ぎじ
zoku	ぞく	gobi	ごび
mabo	まぼ	guzu	ぐず
debeso	でべそ	daba	だば
tsuzuku	つづく		

The two lines of the voiced mark are always written last, after the unvoiced hiragana has been completely drawn.

PLOSIVE MARK



A **plosive mark** indicates a consonant that “explodes” on the lips with a “pop.” Which is probably why it is shaped like a pop-bottle cap. There are only five hiragana that use the **plosive mark**, all from the same hiragana row: *ha*, *hi*, *hu*, *he*, and *ho*, which become *pa*, *pi*, *pu*, *pe*, and *po* respectively (see the table on page 69). Examples follow.

kanpai	かんぱい
enpitsu	えんぴつ
senpu	せんぷ
inpei	いんぺい
pokari	ぽかり

LESSONS

LESSON 1

Before beginning, take a moment to familiarize yourself with the various elements that appear on the individual pages of this book.

② さ

③ ④

① SA

⑤ Beneath the familiar *dagger* is the lower half of the component for *comb*. Let us call it a *hairpin* to remember the similarity of form. The key word here is a *sock*, a particularly old and raunchy one that some lady of questionable taste has stuck in her hair using a *dagger* as a *hairpin* to hold it in place.

⑥

⑦ Note that in nearly all typographical forms, the second and third strokes run together. The more you write the character according to the hand-drawn model above, you will find how the two strokes naturally blend into one another.

⑧ PRONUNCIATION
samurai | sock

⑨

⑩

⑪

⑫

⑬

11

16 GO TO PAGE 7

- ① The pronunciation of the hiragana in question, in standard romanized form.
- ② The hiragana character itself.

The placing of the elements will aid you later in reviewing. By opening the book part way, you can page through and see only the romanized form, leaving the actual hiragana hidden from view.

- ③ The original Chinese character (or kanji) from which the hiragana in question is derived.
- ④ The same kanji written in calligraphic form to show more clearly how it came to its present-day hiragana form.

You should not attempt to memorize the information in this frame now, though at a more advanced level you may find it interesting and helpful for learning the pronunciation of the original kanji.

- ⑤ An explanation of how to remember the hiragana.
- ⑥ Instructions on how to write the hiragana form, stroke by stroke, just as Japanese children do when they are first learning to write.
- ⑦ From time to time a supplementary note, set in italic type, is added with information regarding the writing or pronunciation of a particular hiragana form.
- ⑧ Familiar English words are given as pronunciation samples, since the romanized forms of the hiragana often suggest sounds in English different from those assigned to the hiragana. If you studied Latin, or know a romance language already, these examples will be largely superfluous.
- ⑨ This frame contains 6 examples of stylized typefaces, intended to show the flexibility permitted in writing particular hiragana. You should not attempt to imitate these; it is enough that you take a moment to recognize them.
- ⑩ ⑪ Sample words in which the hiragana being studied appears. The examples use only hiragana that have been learned up to that point, which means you should be able to identify them all—as well as reproduce them all from their romanization. You should not skip any of the examples, though there is no need to bother learning what the words actually mean in Japanese.

- ⑫ The page to proceed to after finishing this page.
- ⑬ The page from which you have just come.

At this point, if you haven't already done so, secure several sheets of blocked paper with blocks at least 1 cm. (1/2 in.) square. You can find them at any stationery store. This will help you keep the shape of your hiragana in proper balance much better than practicing on blank or simple lined paper will.

One more thing. Take a look at the clock and make a note of the time. In less than 30 minutes from now you will be asked to record the time you have spent on these first 9 hiragana in the box provided below.

→ GO TO PAGE 46



Time: LESSON 1

Congratulations! You have just learned 9 of the 46 hiragana, and probably spent less than 30 minutes doing so.

Just above you will see a small box marked *Time: LESSON 1*. Record there how long it took you to complete this first lesson. We will do this at the end of each lesson.

A word about reviewing. If you took your time with each hiragana as you came to it, if you practiced writing it several times, repeating the explanation to yourself as you went, and if you tested yourself on all the sample words, there should be no need to retrace your steps. If you do get stuck, turn to the ALPHABETIC LIST on page 70, locate the problem hiragana, and go through the page all over again, top to bottom. Whatever you do, do NOT waste your time writing any of the hiragana over and over again.

In case you are wondering whether learning to write the hiragana will also mean that you know how to read them, I can assure you that it will. Let

me show you how easy it is. Try reading aloud the following six words:

いけん	のく
いんこ	あへん
くに	この

All the sounds we have learned so far are contained in these words. Once again, do not worry that you don't know what they mean; the only thing we are after here is learning the syllabary.

If you were planning on heading right into LESSON 2, change your plans and take a break now for at least 30 minutes. Go out for a walk or stretch out on the sofa. Your mind has been watching images fly around like shuttles and should be a bit dizzy just now.

END OF LESSON 1

LESSON 2

Now that you are refreshed, we are ready for Lesson 2. Just to flex your muscles a bit, write the hiragana for the following words

<i>iken</i>	<i>noku</i>
<i>inko</i>	<i>ahen</i>
<i>kuni</i>	<i>kono</i>

The answers, if you didn't catch on, are on the top of the previous page. But let us not linger on what you do know; it is time we were back concentrating on what you do *not*.

This lesson will take 8 hiragana, including some of those most easily mixed up by the beginner because of similarity of form. As we shall see, careful attention to the pieces out of which they are constructed will spare you the confusion.

Check your clock and let's away....

→ GO TO PAGE 40



Time: LESSON 2

That's it for the 8 hiragana of LESSON 2. Record your time in the box above and get ready for another break. But first a bonus for making it this far.

In the GENERAL INTRODUCTION mention was made of the fact that the hiragana are laid out in this book in their "dictionary order." Since this is

not the best order for learning them, you are having to hop around from place to place. Eventually you will need to memorize the dictionary order so that you can look words up quickly in Japanese dictionaries. To help, I am going to set the order to a little ditty that should make it just about as easy as it can get.

The first schooling most of us got with butchering French pronunciation came with a song called “Frère Jacques,” which goes like this:

<i>Frère Jacques,</i>	<i>Are you sleeping,</i>
<i>Frère Jacques,</i>	<i>Are you sleeping,</i>
<i>Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?</i>	<i>Brother John, Brother John?</i>
<i>Sonnes les matines,</i>	<i>Morning bells are ringing,</i>
<i>Sonnes les matines,</i>	<i>Morning bells are ringing.</i>
<i>Din, din, don. Din, din, don.</i>	<i>Ding dong ding. Ding dong ding.</i>

Let’s take the first line and change the words to the following four syllables

A – KA – SA – TA ...

Just the first line for now. Let those four syllables resound inside your head for the rest of the day to the tune of “Frère Jacques.” Whenever you’ve got a spare moment, sing them to yourself. In later lessons we will learn the rest of the jingle and also find out what it all means. Right now you don’t have enough hiragana under your belt to make the explanation stick.

END OF LESSON 2

LESSON 3

Here we are over, one-third of the way through the hiragana, and you are probably well ahead of schedule. Just to make sure that you are going at it properly and not getting ahead of yourself, let's take a minute to lay out the principles behind the learning you have been up to so far.

Actually, you have been guided through a series of four stages, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The roman pronunciation of the hiragana is associated either with its alphabetic equivalent or with a word closely related to it in sound and preferably with a clear and concrete meaning.
2. This word associated with the hiragana by sound, which we will refer to from now on as the "key word," is linked to an image that is connected either to the shape of an alphabetic letter or to a picture associated with the key word.
3. If the image is composed of pieces, those pieces are highlighted by focusing the imagination on them within the total picture.
4. The hiragana is drawn, reconstructing the complete image and repeating to yourself the "meaning" of the pieces as you go.

Everyone's mind works differently, but one thing is the same: even when your mental powers are running as efficiently as they can, your mind will occasionally trip over its own feet and trick you into thinking you know something that in fact you do not. The lessons have been kept short to minimize the effects of a loss of concentration. But even so, there may be particular hiragana you have trouble with. Have a good look at them to see which of the four stages your mind tends to ride roughshod over. Then pay it more attention in the future.

There is no point retracing our steps, but just to make sure you have the idea, see if you can identify the key words (stage 1) for the following hiragana syllables:

i *ni*
ke *ku*
n *a*

You shouldn't have any trouble here, but just in case you do, turn to the ALPHABETIC LIST OF THE KANA on page 70 to find the location of the syllable and refresh what you learned there. While you are at it, you might mark off those already learned. In fact, if you haven't be doing it already, you might also mark the pages that you have already worked through. That way, if you decide to test yourself, it will be easier to identify what you should be reviewing.

We will focus on the other three stages in subsequent lessons, but try to be more conscious of them at work as you study the hiragana of this lesson.

Have a look at the clock, mark down the time, and let us be off....

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Time: LESSON 3

And so it goes with LESSON 3. Don't forget to record your time above.

No lesson will be as hard as this has been. From here on, it's all downhill, so keep to your schedule and don't let up on your concentration. The lessons are short enough as it is, but you can't afford to get in too much of a rush and skip over any of the 4 stages we explained on the previous page.

How have you been doing with our little ditty? Can you still recall the first line? You had better, because now it's time for a second line.

A - KA - SA - TA
NA - HA - MA - YA

Try singing both lines, one after the other, until you have the words and melody fixed in your mind. Then just croon away at it during the day and

once more before you fall asleep. In the morning you should find yourself waking up to it, and then we will be ready for the final line.

Meanwhile, it's time for another breather. If you decide you cannot stop yourself from reviewing (and if you took the advice about marking off the pages already learned), you might try opening the book just enough to see the romanized reading and see if you can write the hiragana learned so far.

END OF LESSON 3

LESSON 4

In the previous lesson we gave particular attention to the first stage of isolating the key word derived from the phonetic value of the hiragana. This stage is managed by mere word association, and every effort has been made to insure that it goes effortlessly. In the 9 hiragana of this lesson we focus on the way we have been using the image, a slightly more difficult task.

The importance of a clear image cannot be stressed enough. If you have trouble, try verbalizing the image, describing it slowly to yourself so that it has time to form in your mind's eye. If you take a moment to reconsider hiragana you had trouble with, you will probably find a vague or badly formed image to be the source of the problem. Associating it with memories of particular people, places, animals, and so forth—the first thing that comes to your mind is usually the best—will often help to get you going.

Even in the case of a hiragana whose explanation flows so smoothly that you don't see the need to isolate the stages, you should take at least a quick glance back over your shoulder before turning the page from one hiragana to the next and ask yourself, "What was the keyword of that last hiragana? And how did I get from there to my image?"

If you have time now, you might even run through the hiragana you know to test it out. (Use the ALPHABETIC LIST on page 70 if you took the time in Lesson 3 to mark off the hiragana already learned.)

If you are in a hurry to get on with LESSON 4, then at least take a moment for a quick test. See if you can conjure up the keyword and then the image for the following syllables:

<i>yo</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ma</i>
<i>ri</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>ne</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>ni</i>	

It is time we are on our way again. Have a look at the clock, and dig in your heels for what many consider to be the most difficult of all the hiragana. You will be surprised how a little thoughtful organization on my part,

and an extra moment spent making a clear and vivid mental image on yours, can help you breeze through them in no time at all.

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Time: LESSON 4

Seventy percent of the journey is over, and you have good reason to rejoice. Mark down your time in the box above and take a good long break this time. You might even wait until tomorrow to do another lesson just so you don't glide too fast downhill through the remaining hiragana and forget to pay attention to *how* you are learning, which is almost as important as *what* you are learning.

To keep you company, here's the third line of the "Frère Jacques" song we have been playing with:

A - KA - SA - TA
NA - HA - MA - YA
RA - WA - N, RA - WA - N.

Until later....

END OF LESSON 4

LESSON 5

The hiragana in this lesson are none of them very difficult, but they all require a clear mental image (stage 2 which we reviewed in the previous lesson). This time, let us concentrate on the role of stage 3:

Focus on those parts of the image that represent parts of the completed form.

This sounds so simple that you might have been tempted to overlook it. But there is more than meets the eye.

When you form your first image, your mind will generally be ruled by mere word association with the image running on and off the set like a prop man. The idea is to drag the image to center stage, turn the spotlight on it, and watch what it does when left on its own. You “coach” it along by focusing on the critical parts (those associated with the written strokes), and then patiently wait, eyes closed, until the little magic lantern in your imagination starts spinning and something odd, ridiculous, disgusting, arousing, or otherwise memorable happens. Only then have words turned to image, and to an image you can trust as a mnemonic. This is the crucial step in the process you are learning here, so be sure and watch it at work.

As a test, try the following brief list, asking yourself what it was that made the image and its critical parts particularly memorable for you when you learned it:

<i>ma</i>	<i>mu</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>yo</i>
<i>su</i>	<i>ki</i>

There is no need to worry that so many of the same pieces keep turning up again and again. This is done deliberately to eliminate, or at least reduce as far as possible, the work of brute memory and let you concentrate on imaginative memory.

In other words, rather than clutter your memory with too many “pieces,” I am asking you to flex your creative muscles to build up a large number of images out of a few simple pieces.

Well, that's enough about the theory. It's time to get back to the practice. Take note of the time and carry on with LESSON 5.

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Time: LESSON 5

If you followed my advice, you probably found this lesson something of a strain. But don't let up. There is only one more lesson, and it, too, demands the same attention. First, mark down the time in the box above.

By now you should know the entire "Hiragana Song." Let us just add a conventional ending so as not to leave the melody hanging in the air:

A - KA - SA - TA

NA - HA - MA - YA

RA - WA - N, RA - WA - N.

Now I know my kana! Now I know my kana!

Ding, dong, ding. Ding, dong, ding.

It is time we clarified what this all means. The Japanese syllabary follows an order quite different from our typical Western alphabets. Think of the sounds as lined up in two directions. Turn to the TABLE OF THE KANA on page 68, and you will see what I mean.

Vertically the syllables are lined up according to the five vowel sounds that, either on their own or in combination with a consonant, gives the Japanese language its basic phonetic units (the solitary consonant *ん* being the only exception). They follow the sequence *あいうえお*, as in the column on the far left. There is no need to work up a mnemonic for that sequence; everyone I know learns it in a few seconds.

Horizontally, the syllables follow the order we learned in our little song. Thus a dictionary will first list words beginning with *あいうえお*, and then

pass on to words starting with か, き, く, け, and こ . This sequence is followed by た, ち, つ..., and so forth and so on. Now perhaps you see why it is important to master the order of the 11 syllables we learned in our little song. Without it, you will waste a lot of time fumbling hit-and-miss around Japanese dictionaries.

Enough for now. Time for a good rest to prepare yourself for the final lesson.

END OF LESSON 5

LESSON 6

With this lesson you come to the end of your study. A mere 7 hiragana and 2 diacritical marks separate you from your goal of knowing how to read and write the Japanese syllabary.

I have deliberately left for this final lesson those hiragana that you might call “exceptions,” in the sense that they entail slight distortions of familiar pieces. Meeting them here at this late stage, at least you can console yourself with the thought that there will not be any more of them.

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Time: LESSON 6

The course is run. Mark down your time in the box above, and take a minute now to add up the time in all the boxes to find out how much time you spent learning the ひらがな. Record it in the box below. Someday you may want to persuade someone else to learn them the same way you did, and your record will speak for itself. The main thing, as you have no doubt

TOTAL TIME SPENT IN LEARNING THE HIRAGANA

realized by now, is that being conscious of the clock helped you to break the task up into digestible pieces and probably gave you some added encouragement along the way.

There are no more written shapes to memorize. You are finished with all that. There are only three more things you need to know about the hiragana, some of them already touched on in the course of the previous lessons, and all of them better learned by actual use of the hiragana than by brute memory of any “rules”: (1) the composition of diphthongs, (2) the transcription of long vowels, and (3) the doubling of consonants. Let us look at them, briefly, one by one.

1. Regarding the diphthongs, a table has been prepared on page 69 showing all the possible diphthongs that can be made with the hiragana (and katakana). The second vowel of the diphthong is written in a smaller form and set at the baseline of the primary vowel.
2. Long vowels—that is, vowels that are held twice as long as normal—are indicated by adding a *う* after hiragana ending in an *o* or *u* sound, as in the words *とうきょう*, *じゅうどう* and *すそう*. Their transcription in the roman alphabet is indicated by a macron set over the lengthened vowel. Thus the three words above would be written: *Tōkyō*, *jūdō* and *sumō*.
3. Finally, a consonant is “doubled” much the same way that a vowel is lengthened, namely, by doubling the time given to it. Whereas a vowel can naturally be prolonged, doubling a consonant requires a glottal stop. This is indicated by the inclusion of a small *っ* before the consonant to be doubled, as in the following examples: *そっと* (*motto*) | *ほっかいどう* (*Hokkaidō*) | *あっさり* (*assari*). Only hiragana beginning with the consonants *k*, *s*, *t*, *g*, *z*, *d*, *b* and *p* can be doubled this way.

Even if you are confident that you have learned the *ひらがな*, you want to be sure that they *stay* learned until they have become a permanent habit—as “second nature” to you as the alphabet is.

To begin with, you should sweep out of your mind any lingering doubts that the achievement is beyond your reach. If you have followed this little book faithfully, you are already well on your way to the same fluency that the Japanese themselves have.

Next, write the *ひらがな* as often as you can. Two things will happen the more you write. First, you will get faster at writing and not have to stop to

think about how individual hiragana are constructed. Secondly, your writing will start to take on its own character, which can also mean some bad habits. When you feel this happening, it is best to seek the guidance of someone with a more cultivated hand who can point out what your writing lacks in grace and elegance.

My parting advice, or rather stern admonition, is, therefore, this: *Never again write so much as a single Japanese word with roman letters unless you are doing it for someone who does not read ひらがな*. Since you no longer belong to that group, you should have no more occasion to use roman letters for Japanese words than the average Japanese does. You might save yourself a few moments now and again if you jot down a note in the roman alphabet, but the inevitable cumulative effect of these apparently trivial “exceptions” is to forfeit the ability, already within your reach, to write with native fluency. Take the warning to heart and I guarantee you will never regret it—not for a minute!

END OF THE HIRAGANA

TABLE OF THE KANA

あ	ア	い	イ	う	ウ	え	エ	お	オ
か	カ	き	キ	く	ク	け	ケ	こ	コ
さ	サ	し	シ	す	ス	せ	セ	そ	ソ
た	タ	ち	チ	つ	ツ	て	テ	と	ト
な	ナ	に	ニ	ぬ	ヌ	ね	ネ	の	ノ
は	ハ	ひ	ヒ	ふ	フ	へ	ヘ	ほ	ホ
ま	マ	み	ミ	む	ム	め	メ	も	モ
や	ヤ			ゆ	ユ			よ	ヨ
ら	ラ	り	リ	る	ル	れ	レ	ろ	ロ
わ	ワ							を	ヲ
ん	ン								
が	ガ	ぎ	ギ	ぐ	グ	げ	ゲ	ご	ゴ
ざ	ザ	じ	ジ	ず	ズ	ぜ	ゼ	ぞ	ゾ
だ	ダ	ぢ	ヂ	づ	ヅ	で	デ	ど	ド
ば	バ	び	ビ	ぶ	ブ	べ	ベ	ぼ	ボ
ぱ	パ	ぴ	ピ	ぷ	プ	ぺ	ペ	ぽ	ポ

TABLE OF DIPHTHONGS

VA	TSA	FA						しや	ちや	にや	ひや		みや	りや	ぎや	じや	びや	びや
								きや	しゃ	ちゃ	ひや							
									SHA	CHA	NYA	HYA		MYA	RYA	GYA	JA	BYA
ヴァ	ツァ	ファ						キヤ	シャ	チャ	ヒヤ		ミヤ	リヤ	ギヤ	ジャ	ビヤ	ピヤ
VI	TI	FI	DI															
ヴァイ	テイ	ファイ	ダイ															
								きゆ	しゆ	ちゆ	ひゆ		みゆ	りゆ	ぎゆ	じゆ	びゆ	びゆ
VU	TU		DU					KYU	SHU	CHU	HYU	FYU	MYU	RYU	GYU	JU	BYU	PYU
ヴ	トゥ		ドゥ					キユ	シュ	チュ	ヒユ	フユ	ミユ	リュ	ギユ	ジュ	ビユ	ピユ
VE	TSE	FE							SHE	CHE								
ヴェ	ツェ	フェ							シェ	チェ								
								きよ	しよ	ちよ	ひよ		みよ	りよ	ぎよ	じよ	びよ	びよ
VO	TSO	FO						KYO	SHO	CHO	HYO		MYO	RYO	GYO	JO	BYO	PYO
ヴォ	ツォ	フォ						キョ	ショ	チョ	ヒョ		ミョ	リョ	ギョ	ジョ	ビョ	ピョ

ALPHABETIC LIST OF THE KANA

a 1	ki 7	no 25	su 13
chi . . . 17	ko 10	nu 23	ta 16
e 4	ku 8	o 5	te 19
fu 28	ma . . . 31	ra 39	to 20
ha 26	me . . . 34	re 42	tsu . . . 18
he 29	mi . . . 32	ri 40	u 3
hi 27	mo . . . 35	ro 43	wa 44
ho 30	mu . . . 33	ru 41	wo 45
i 2	n 46	sa 11	ya 36
ka 6	na . . . 21	se 14	yo 38
ke 9	ne . . . 24	shi . . . 12	yu 37
	ni 22	so 15	