

ひらがな
ひらがな
ひらがな
ひらがな
ひらがな

Learn Hiragana

by TOFUGU



WHAT IS HIRAGANA ?

Hiragana are a type of Japanese character. They're sort of like a Japanese alphabet, in that each hiragana character is used to represent a sound. That means that by learning hiragana characters, you'll also learn basic Japanese pronunciation! In essence, remembering hiragana is the first step to learning Japanese.

AN OVERVIEW OF HIRAGANA

There are 46 basic hiragana in total, typically presented in these ten columns.

	K	S	T	N	H	M	Y	R	W
あ A	か KA	さ SA	た TA	な NA	は HA	ま MA	や YA	ら RA	わ WA
い I	き KI	し SHI	ち CHI	に NI	ひ HI	み MI		り RI	
う U	く KU	す SU	つ TSU	ぬ NU	ふ FU	む MU	ゆ YU	る RU	を O
え E	け KE	せ SE	て TE	ね NE	へ HE	め ME		れ RE	
お O	こ KO	そ SO	と TO	の NO	ほ HO	も MO	よ YO	ろ RO	ん N

The first column consists of five vowels: あ (A) - い (I) - う (U) - え (E) - お (O).

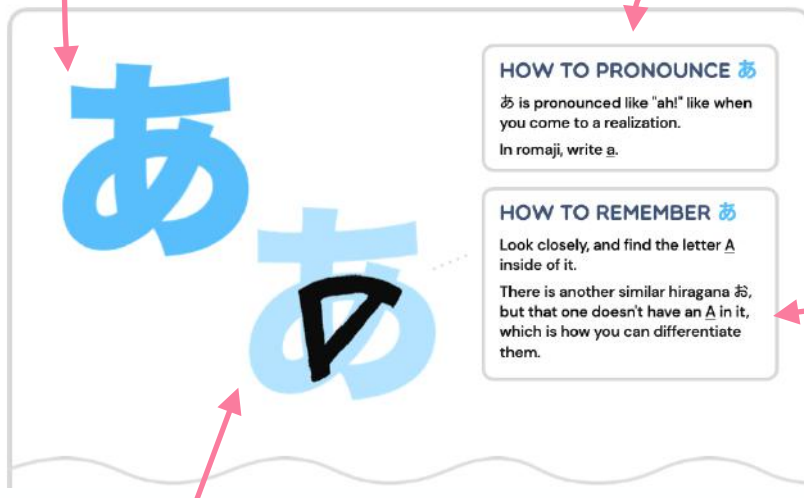
The rest of the hiragana pair one of these vowels with a consonant sound. Take a look at the second column, the K-column. It includes か (KA) - き (KI) - く (KU) - け (KE) - こ (KO). See how they're just "K" sounds combined with the five vowels from the first column?

This pattern gives us all the columns for K - S - T - H - M - Y - R - W sounds, and as you can see from the chart, they (almost) all follow the same rule. You may notice some exceptions, but don't worry — you'll learn about those later in this book.

HOW TO USE THE LEARN HIRAGANA BOOK

PAGE FOR EACH HIRAGANA

This is the kana (hiragana) you'll be learning on the page.



THE HOW TO PRONOUNCE section explains how to say the kana.

It also tells you how to write the kana in romaji (a system that transliterates Japanese into English letters). Pay attention to the romaji spelling, as you'll be quizzed later on!

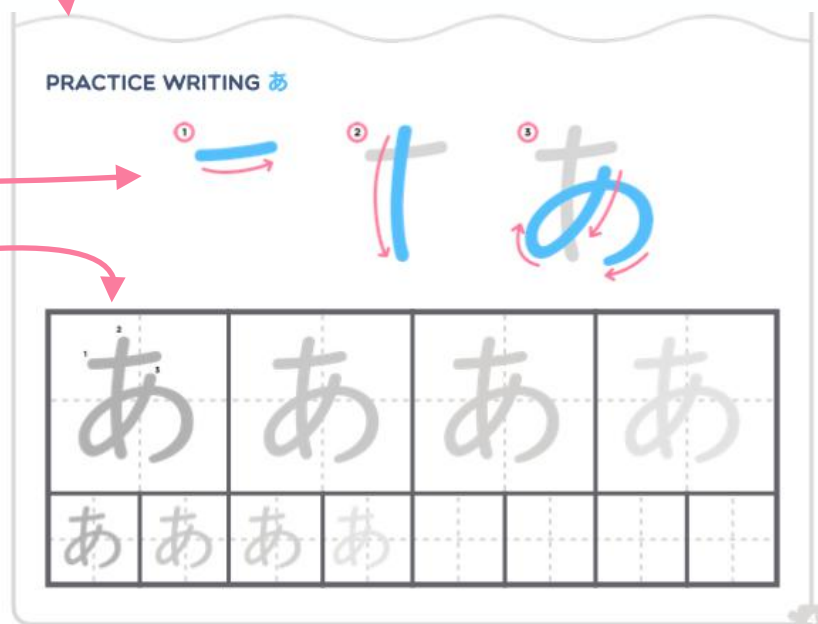
This is a supplemental image to the **HOW TO REMEMBER** section. It visually illustrates how the memory hint works.

THE HOW TO REMEMBER section gives you a "memory hint," a.k.a. a mnemonic, to help you link the shape and the reading of the kana. You may find some quirky ones, but believe me — they'll help the kana stick to your brain!

This shows the stroke order for writing the kana. As for stroke direction, keep in mind that the basic rule is left to right, top to bottom.

The bottom half of the page is the **PRACTICE WRITING** section.

Do some practice writing the kana, tracing over the lines first, then filling in the blank boxes! At this stage, writing is not as important as being able to read, but moving your hand and practicing writing will help you remember the kana.



REVIEW PAGE FOR EACH COLUMN

After you learn a set/column of kana, you'll see a page called **LET'S PRACTICE READING!** where you can review what you've learned.

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

お	い	あ	お	え	い	う	え	お	あ



あ	

あ! means ah! — something you say when you come to a realization.



あ	お

あお means blue.



い	え

いえ means house.



う	え

うえ means above.



お	う

おう means king.

Here in the boxes below each kana, just fill in the romaji reading of the corresponding kana.

This helps you self-assess and see how much you have (or haven't) retained.

If you find yourself having a hard time remembering a specific kana, you can always go back to that kana's page to review.

You can also try to come up with memory hints of your own if that works better for you!

The reading quiz continues! Keep filling in the kana readings in romaji.

What's different (and kind of cool) in this part is that the kana are used for making actual Japanese words. You'll realize that you already know how to read some Japanese words in hiragana!

Each word contains at least one kana from the column you're reviewing, but keep in mind that you may see some kana from previous columns being used as well.

So when you're using this book, try to follow the order it's in to get the most out of it.

— Are you ready to learn all the hiragana now? Good luck!

あ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE あ

あ is pronounced like "ah!" like when you come to a realization.

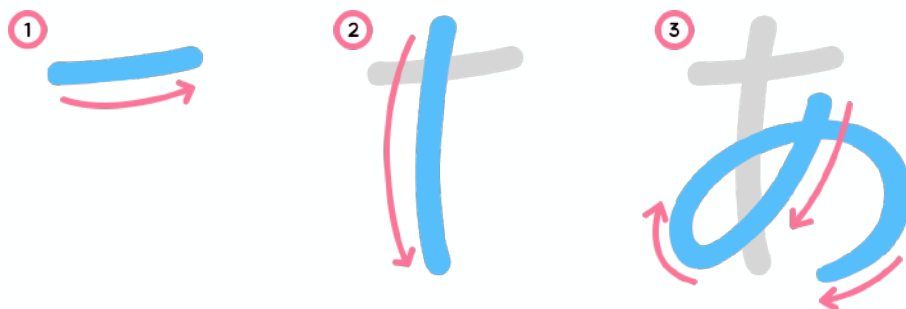
In romaji, write a.

HOW TO REMEMBER あ

Look closely, and find the letter A inside of it.

There is another similar hiragana, お, but that one doesn't have an A in it, which is how you can differentiate them.

PRACTICE WRITING あ



あ	あ	あ	あ
あ	あ	あ	あ

い



HOW TO PRONOUNCE い

い is pronounced like the ee in "eel."

In romaji, write i.

HOW TO REMEMBER い

To remember this kana, just think of a couple of eels hanging out.

They're upright because they're trying to mimic the letter i, which also stands upright and happens to be the way you spell out this character in romaji.

PRACTICE WRITING い



1	2						
い	い	い	い	い	い	い	い



HOW TO PRONOUNCE う

う is pronounced like ooh in "ooh, ahh!"

In other words, it sounds like u in "UNO," the card game, or the number one in Spanish.

In romaji, write u.

HOW TO REMEMBER う

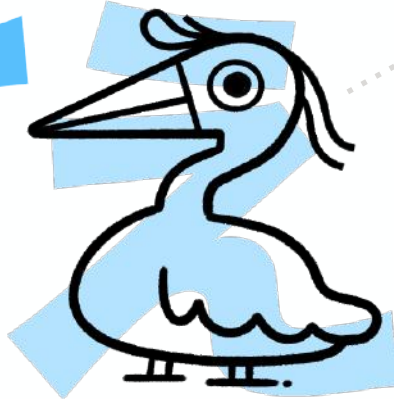
To remember this kana, notice the U shape right in it!

There's another similar hiragana, つ, but that one isn't wearing a hat like U (you) are. Ooh, ahh, what a nifty hat!

PRACTICE WRITING う



え



HOW TO PRONOUNCE え

え is pronounced like the e in "egg."

In romaji, write e.

HOW TO REMEMBER え

Look at this kana and find the exotic bird laying exotic eggs inside of it.

The feather on its head gives away that it's special and exotic, and the flourish looks like its body and tail. How adorable!

PRACTICE WRITING え



え	え	え	え
え	え	え	え

お

お

HOW TO PRONOUNCE お

お is pronounced like you're saying "oh." It's the o sound in "origami."

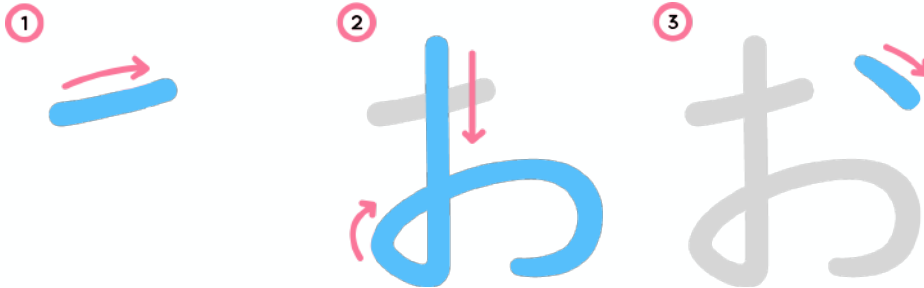
In romaji, write o.

HOW TO REMEMBER お

Can you see the letter o in here, two times? This one looks similar to あ, except for one key difference: there are two letter o symbols visible in there.

Make sure you use this to differentiate this kana お and the similar kana あ.

PRACTICE WRITING お



お	お	お	お
お	お	お	お

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

お	い	あ	お	え	い	う	え	お	あ



あ

あ! means ah! — something you say when you come to a realization.



あ	お

あお means blue.



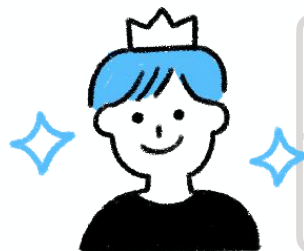
い	え

いえ means house.



う	え

うえ means above.



お	う

おう means king.

か



HOW TO PRONOUNCE か

か is just the K sound plus あ, making a ka sound. It's pronounced like ka in "karma."

In romaji, write ka.

HOW TO REMEMBER か

See how this kana looks like a mosquito? What a convenient coincidence! Mosquitos happen to be called か (ka) in Japanese. You also say "cut it out, darn mosquito!" when they try to suck your blood, so that should be easy to remember.

PRACTICE WRITING か



か	か	か	か
か	か	か	か

き



HOW TO PRONOUNCE き

き is just the K sound plus い, making a ki sound. It's pronounced kee, just like the word "key."

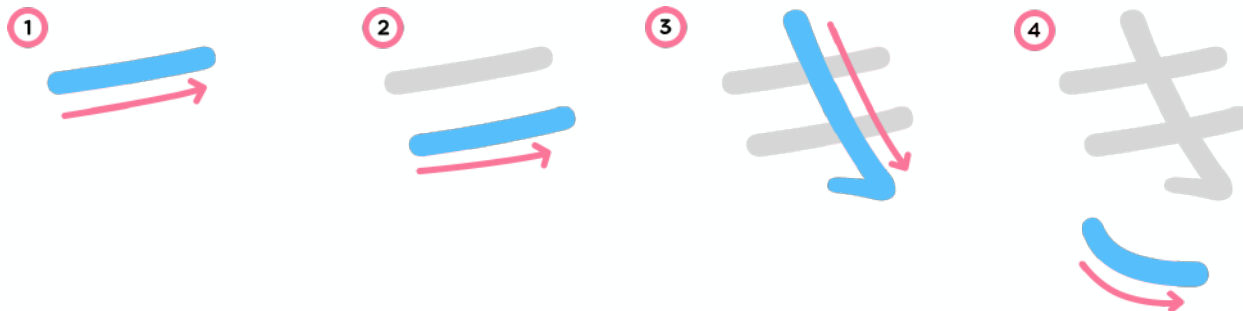
In romaji, write ki.

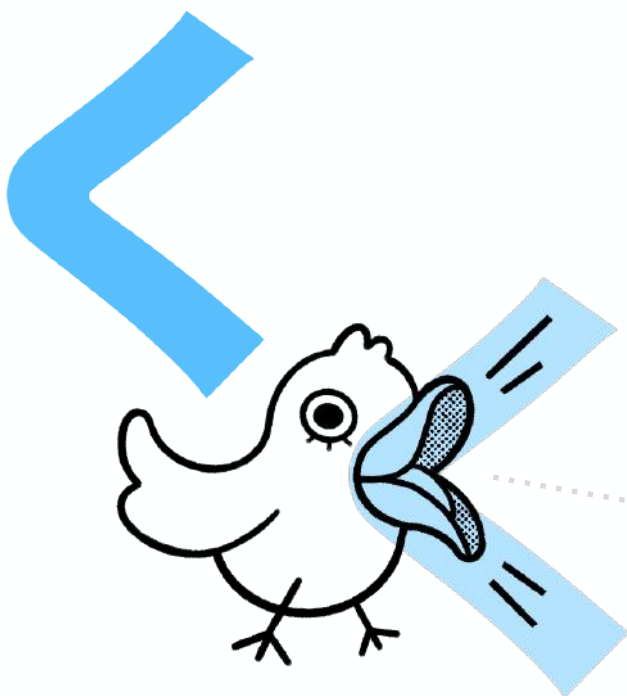
HOW TO REMEMBER き

Notice how the shape of き resembles a key?

Note: In some fonts, the bottom part is detached from the main part. For example: き. The pronunciation is still ki though!

PRACTICE WRITING き





HOW TO PRONOUNCE <

< is just the K sound plus う, making a ku sound.

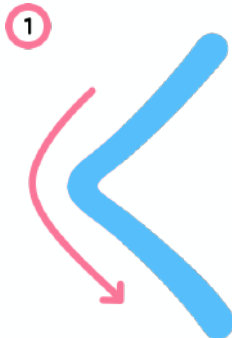
It's pronounced coo, like both syllables of the word "cuckoo" (or just the first syllable, depending on your variety of English).

In romaji, write ku.

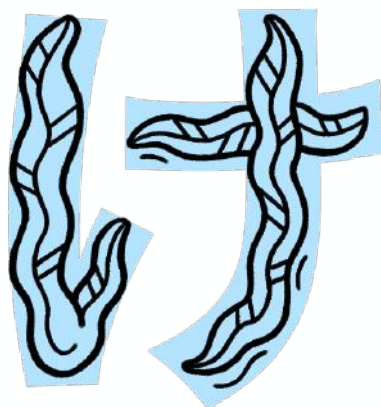
HOW TO REMEMBER <

To remember this, think of this kana being the mouth of a coo-coo / cuckoo bird popping out and saying "ku ku, ku ku!".

PRACTICE WRITING <



け



HOW TO PRONOUNCE け

け is just the K sound plus え, making a ke sound.

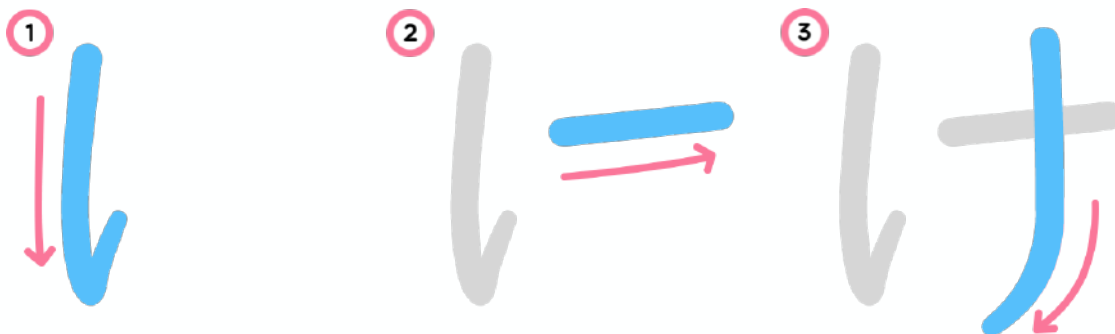
It's pronounced like ke in "kelp."

In romaji, write ke.

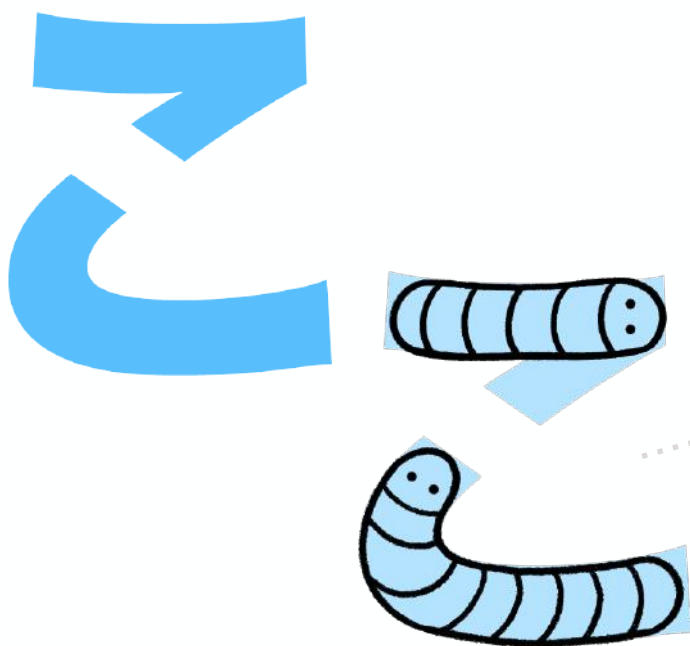
HOW TO REMEMBER け

See how this kana resembles some wiggly kelp?

PRACTICE WRITING け



け	け	け	け				
け	け	け	け				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE こ

こ is just the K sound plus お, making a ko sound. It's pronounced like co in "cohabitating." In British English, it is more like co in "coin."

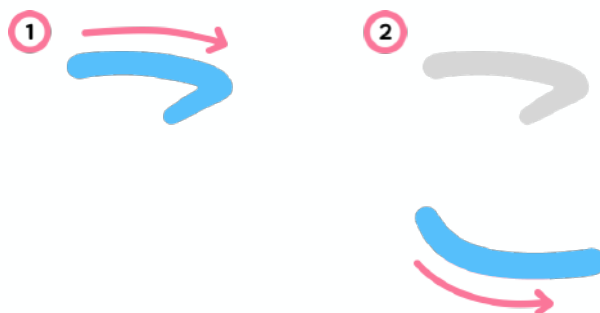
In romaji, write ko.

HOW TO REMEMBER こ

こ is a couple of co-habitating worms. They're so happy together, co-habitating the same area!

Alternatively, you could imagine a couple of short cord^s lying on the ground next to each other.

PRACTICE WRITING こ



1 2							

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

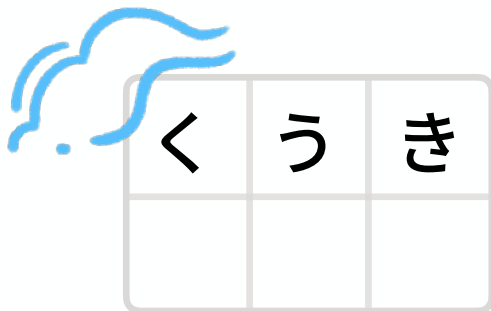
く	き	け	か	き	こ	く	か	け	こ



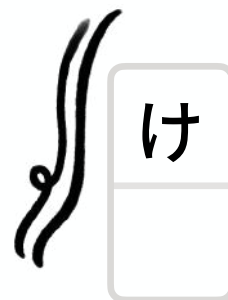
か means mosquito.



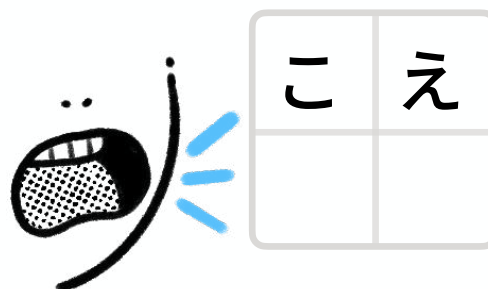
き means tree.



くうき means air.



け means hair.



こえ means voice.

さ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE さ

さ is just the S sound plus あ, making a sa sound. It's pronounced like sa in "salsa."

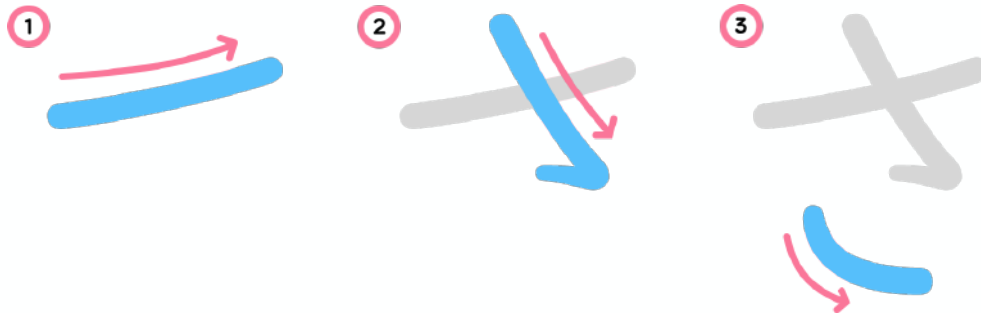
In romaji, write sa.

HOW TO REMEMBER さ

Notice how this kana looks like two hands stirring a bowl of salsa.

This salsa is so chunky and thick, you need two hands just to stir it!

PRACTICE WRITING さ



し



HOW TO PRONOUNCE し

し is the SH sound plus い, making a shi sound. It's pronounced like shee in "sheep."

Take note that this is the first "exception" kana that doesn't follow the patterns that show up everywhere else. Instead of being si, it's shi.

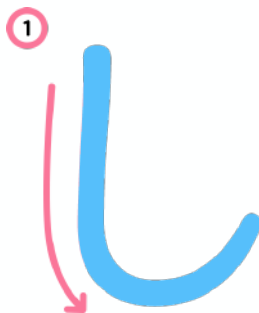
In romaji, write si or shi.

HOW TO REMEMBER し

This kana looks like a giant shepherd's crook used to herd sheep.

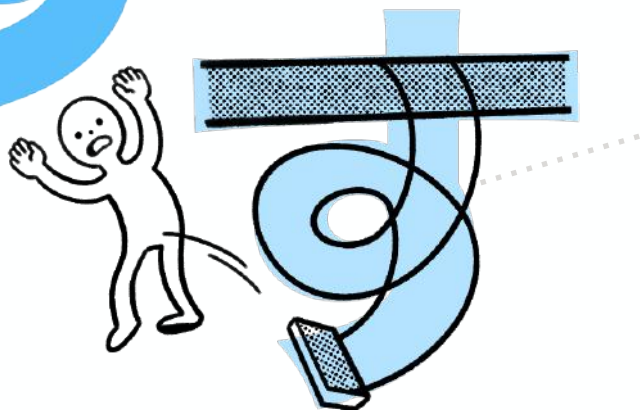
Baaaaa... get in that corral, sheep!

PRACTICE WRITING し



し	し	し	し				
し	し	し	し				

す



HOW TO PRONOUNCE す

す is just the S sound plus う, making a su sound. It's pronounced like the word "sue," or su in "suit."

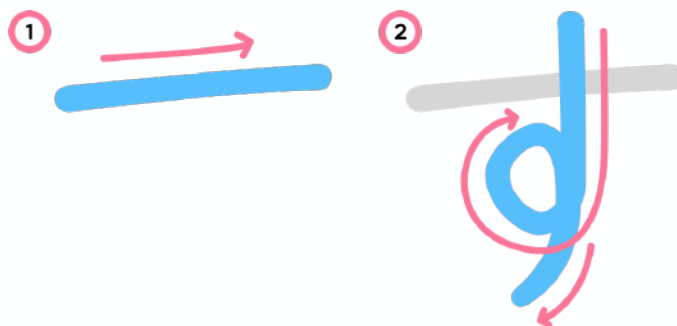
In romaji, write su.

HOW TO REMEMBER す

See the swing doing a loop-dee-loop and throwing that poor kid off of it?

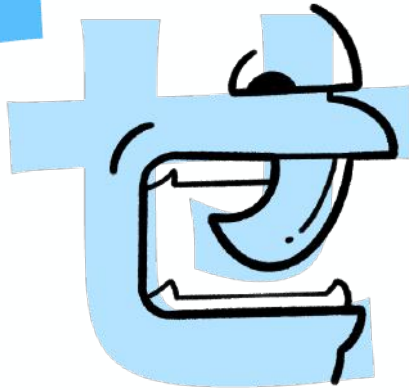
Imagine him screaming "I'M GONNA SUE SOMEBODY FOR THIIIIIIiiissss" as he flies off into the distance.

PRACTICE WRITING す



す	す	す	す				
す	す	す	す				

せ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE せ

せ is just the S sound plus え, making a se sound. It's pronounced like se in "sell."

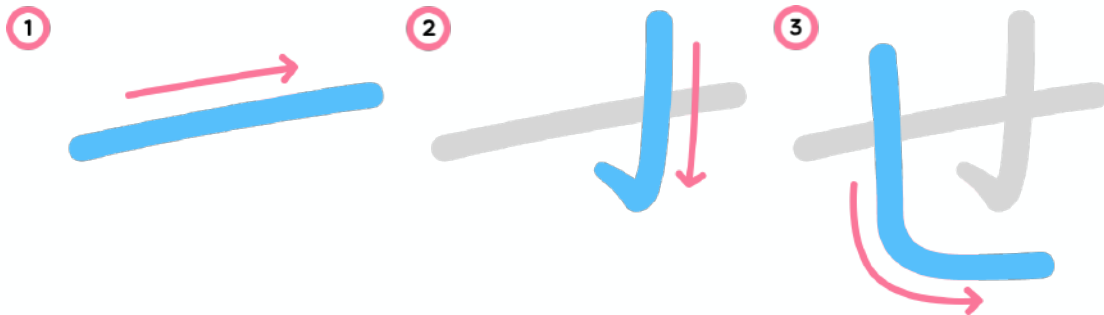
In romaji, write se.

HOW TO REMEMBER せ

This kana looks like a mouth with a big vampire fang in it. Someone's trying to sell you a set of vampire teeth because they are just so sexy!

Oh Dracula, always trying to make a quick buck.

PRACTICE WRITING せ



せ	せ	せ	せ
せ	せ	せ	せ

そ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE そ

そ is just the S sound plus お, making a so sound.

It's pronounced like so in "soda." In British English, it's more like so in "song."

In romaji, write so.

HOW TO REMEMBER そ

See how this kana looks like a mouth slurping soda?

PRACTICE WRITING そ



そ	そ	そ	そ				
そ	そ	そ	そ				

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

し	さ	そ	せ	す	そ	し	せ	さ	す



さ	か

さか means steep hill.



し	お

しお means salt.



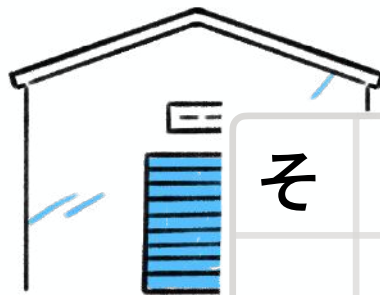
す

す means vinegar.



せ

せ means height.



そ	う	こ

そうこ means warehouse.

LET'S PRACTICE READING HIRAGANA FROM A - K - S ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

う	こ	さ	い	く	あ	せ	け	お	き

す	い	か	う	し	そ	お	あ	す	け

き	せ	し	あ	す	く	う	お	さ	い

か	け	い	そ	す	う	え	き	け	し

あ	せ	う	け	く	お	い	え	こ	せ

き	そ	い	さ	か	あ	き	う	け	お

た



HOW TO PRONOUNCE た

た is just the t sound plus あ, making a ta sound. It's pronounced like ta in taco.

In romaji, write ta.

HOW TO REMEMBER た

Use your imagination and see this kana as a fork, taco, and lime garnish for your taco.

Wait... you're eating a taco with a fork? That's a bit weird, but you do you, pal.

PRACTICE WRITING た



た	た	た	た				
た	た	た	た				

ち



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ち

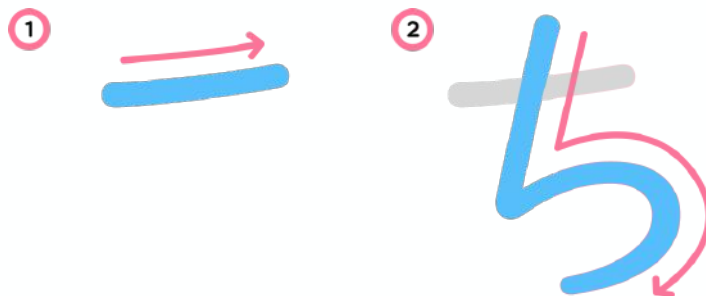
ち is pronounced like "chee" in "cheese." This is the second "exception" hiragana. Instead of a "ti" sound, it's a "chi" sound. Try not to forget this.

In romaji, write ti or chi.

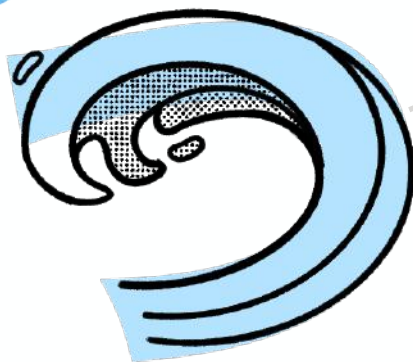
HOW TO REMEMBER ち

You know when someone tells you to say "cheese" when taking a picture of you? This kana looks like that forced smile you have to make every time you're in a group photo.

PRACTICE WRITING ち



ち	ち	ち	ち
ち	ち	ち	ち



HOW TO PRONOUNCE つ

つ is just the TS sound plus う, making a tsu sound. It's pronounced like tsu in "tsunami."

This is another "exception" hiragana. Instead of saying "tu," you say "tsu." Try not to forget this.

In romaji, write tu or tsu.

HOW TO REMEMBER つ

Look at the swoosh of this hiragana. Doesn't it look like a big wave, or tsunami?

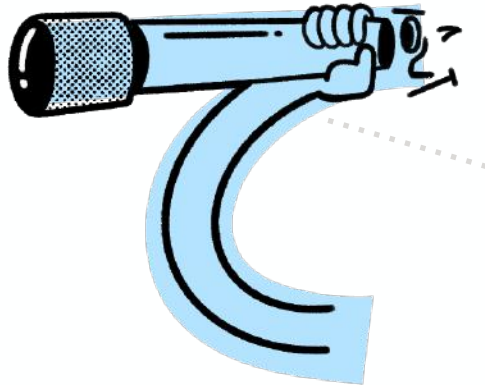
PRACTICE WRITING つ

1



1							
つ	つ	つ	つ				

て



HOW TO PRONOUNCE て

て is just the t sound plus え, making a te sound. It's pronounced like te in "telescope."

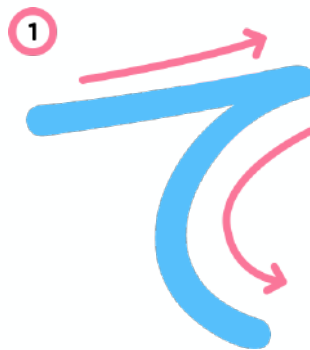
In romaji, write te.

HOW TO REMEMBER て

Can you see a good ol' telescope?

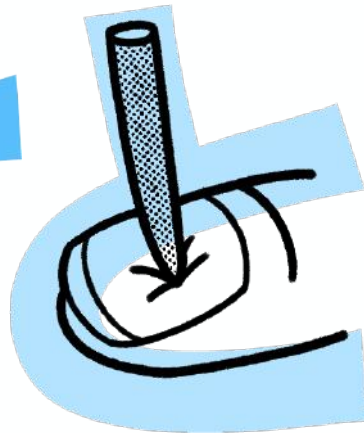
It's a hand-held one! In Japanese, "hand" is て (te). That should help you remember that this kana looks like an old-school hand(te)-held telescope.

PRACTICE WRITING て



て	て	て	て				
て	て	て	て				

と



HOW TO PRONOUNCE と

と is just the "T" sound plus お, making a to sound.

It's pronounced like to in "toe." In British English, it sounds like to in "top."

In romaji, write to.

HOW TO REMEMBER と

This kana looks just like someone's toe with a little nail or splinter in it.

Imagine how much this would hurt if it was your toe!

PRACTICE WRITING と

①



②



と	と	と	と				
と	と	と	と				

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

と	ち	た	つ	て	た	と	ち	つ	て



た	つ

たつ means to stand.

ち	か

ちか means underground.



つ	き

つき means moon.



て

て means hand.



と

と means and.

な



HOW TO PRONOUNCE な

な is just the N sound plus あ, making a na sound. It's pronounced like na in "nachos."

In romaji, write na.

HOW TO REMEMBER な

The nun is praying in front of the cross asking for nachos, because she's craving a delicious snack!

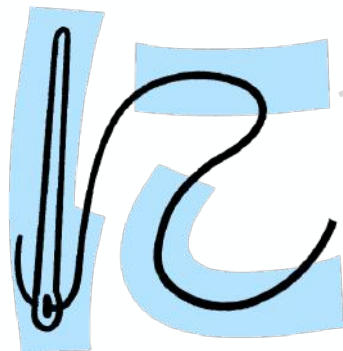
The cross up in the air should be the main giveaway that this is な.

PRACTICE WRITING な



	な	な	な
な	な	な	な

に



HOW TO PRONOUNCE に

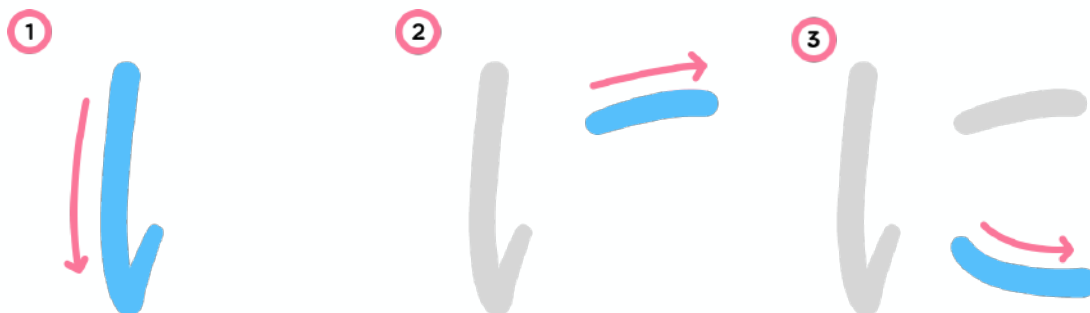
に is just the N sound plus い, making a ni sound. It's pronounced like nee in "needle."

In romaji, write ni.

HOW TO REMEMBER に

Do you see the needle pulling the thread?

PRACTICE WRITING に



1 に	に	に	に				
に	に	に	に				

ぬ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ぬ

ぬ is just the N sound plus う, making a nu sound. It's pronounced like noo in "noodle."

In romaji, write nu.

HOW TO REMEMBER ぬ

This kana looks like some noodles. There are several other kana that are similar to this one (れ, め, ね, わ), but you know this one is noodles because there are no sharp angles in it. It's 100% smooth and bendable, like noodles! It even has an extra loop at the bottom, because it is a noodle.

PRACTICE WRITING ぬ

1



2



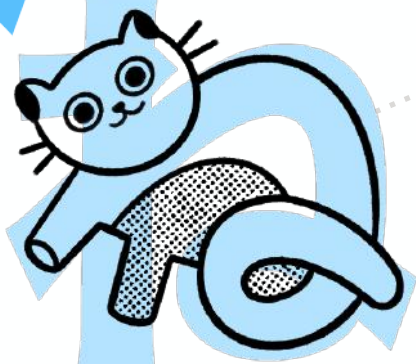
ぬ	ぬ	ぬ	ぬ
ぬ	ぬ	ぬ	ぬ

ね

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ね

ね is just the N sound plus え, making a ne sound. It's pronounced like ne in "Nelly."

In romaji, write ne.



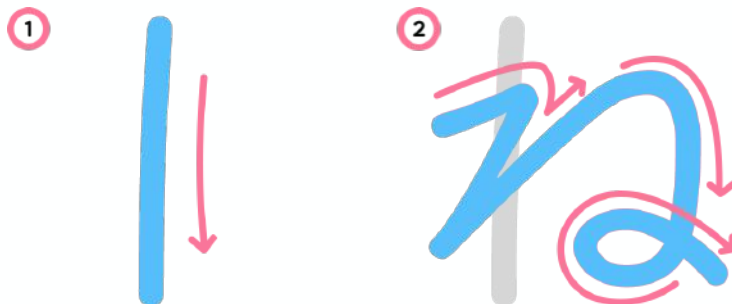
HOW TO REMEMBER ね

This is Nelly the cat. There are other kana very similar to this one (ぬ, れ, め, わ), but you know this is different. Why? Because it has a loop at the end for the tail, and it's not super bendable like め (noodles) is — see those sharp corners on the left?

To top things off, Nelly is a necromancer. Why? I have no idea, you'll have to ask her. It must have something to do with the undead cat army she's creating.

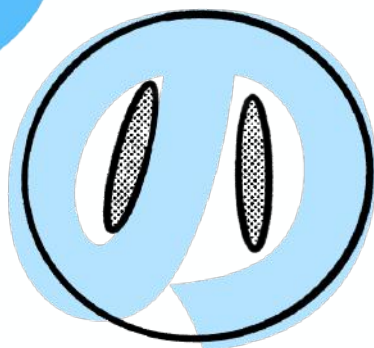
Also, if you know the word "neko" (Japanese for "cat"), you can use that too. This is a ねこ.

PRACTICE WRITING ね



ね	ね	ね	ね
ね	ね	ね	ね

の



HOW TO PRONOUNCE の

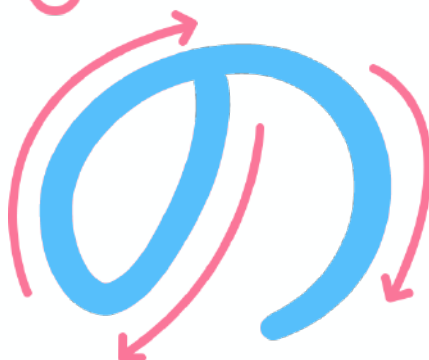
の is just the N sound plus お, making a no sound. It's pronounced like no in "nose" or "nori."

In romaji, write no.

HOW TO REMEMBER の

See the big pig nose there? You can also think of this as a "No smoking" sign (the one with the cigarette and big red circle/slash through it). Pick the one that sticks with you the best.

PRACTICE WRITING の ①



の	の	の	の				
の	の	の	の				

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

な	の	に	ぬ	ね	の	に	ぬ	な	ね



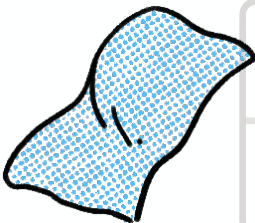
な	す

なす means eggplant.



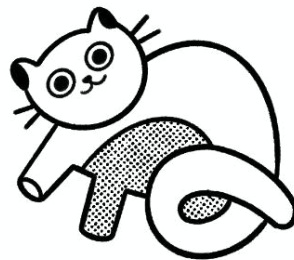
に	く

にく means meat.



ぬ	の

ぬの means fabric.



ね	こ

ねこ means cat.



の	う

のう means brain.

は

は

HOW TO PRONOUNCE は

は is just the H sound plus あ, making a ha sound. It's pronounced like ha in "haha" (like laughing!).

In romaji, write ha.

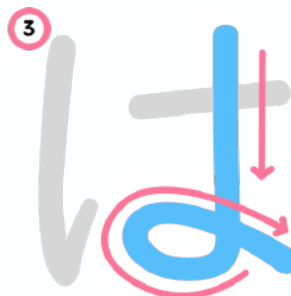
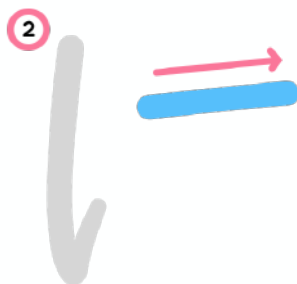
HOW TO REMEMBER は

This kana looks like an uppercase letter H plus a lowercase letter a.

What does that spell? "Ha!"

Why are you laughing? Stop that. Make sure you can see the H+a in the kana.

PRACTICE WRITING は



1 は	は	は	は
は	は	は	は

ひ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ひ

ひ is just the H sound plus い, making a hi sound.

It's like the English pronoun "he." In other words, it sounds like "he" in "heat."

In romaji, write hi.

HOW TO REMEMBER ひ

He has a big nose. See that big nose? Now say it out loud. "He has a big nose."

PRACTICE WRITING ひ

1



ひ	ひ	ひ	ひ				
ひ	ひ	ひ	ひ				

ふ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ふ

ふ is halfway between the F and H sounds, plus う, making a fu / hu sound.

It's pronounced like a softly blown-out version of foo in "fool," or sometimes hoo in "hoop."

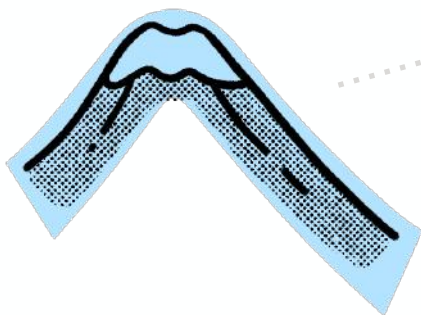
In romaji, write either fu or hu.

HOW TO REMEMBER ふ

Someone is over there dancing like a fool. What's that around their neck? ...Oh, that's a hula hoop! That's why they're twisting their body so hard.

PRACTICE WRITING ふ





HOW TO PRONOUNCE ^

へ is just the H sound plus ゼ, making a he sound. It's pronounced like he in "help," or "Helens."

In romaji, write he.

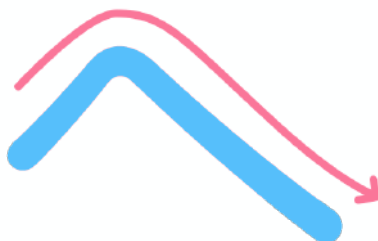
HOW TO REMEMBER ^

Do you know the famous mountain Mt. Saint Helens? This kana isn't totally flat like Helens is, but it's pretty squat-looking.

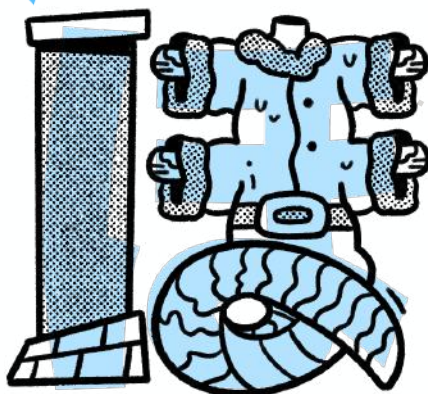
That's why this one is Helens. If it ever erupts again, people will need help!

PRACTICE WRITING ^

①



ほ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ほ

ほ is just the H sound plus お, making a ho sound.

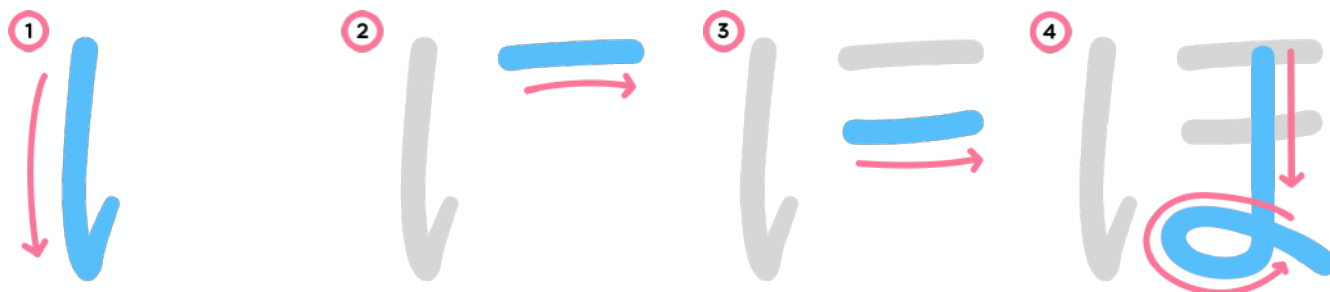
It's pronounced like ho in "hoe" or "ho ho ho!" In British English, it sounds more like ho in "hot."

In romaji, write ho.

HOW TO REMEMBER ほ

The line on the left is a chimney. The right side is a mutated Santa Claus. He has four arms, a snake tail, and no head. Out of his neck he's uttering "ho ho ho... ho ho ho..." Hopefully he doesn't come down your chimney.

PRACTICE WRITING ほ



ほ	ほ	ほ	ほ
ほ	ほ	ほ	ほ

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

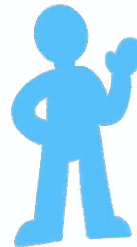
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

へ	ふ	は	ひ	ほ	ふ	は	ひ	へ	ほ



は	い

はい means yes.



ひ	と

ひと means person.



ふ	く

ふく means clothes.



へ	そ

へそ means belly button.



ほ	の	お

ほのお means fire.

LET'S PRACTICE READING HIRAGANA FROM T - N - H ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

の	は	と	に	ほ	た	て	ね	の	な

ひ	な	ほ	ち	て	に	ふ	た	ぬ	て

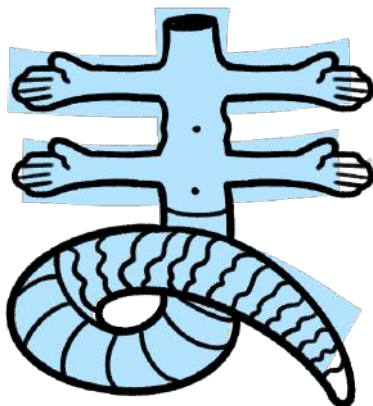
と	つ	に	へ	ね	つ	の	な	は	た

の	な	ね	は	に	と	ぬ	ほ	ひ	へ

ち	ぬ	ふ	な	ほ	た	に	ね	と	な

ひ	ふ	は	ね	ち	つ	ほ	へ	ぬ	の

ま



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ま

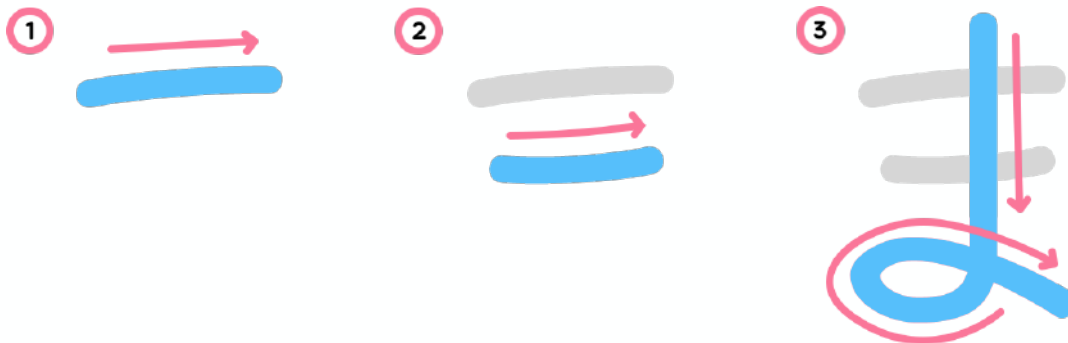
ま is just the "M" sound plus あ, making a ma sound. It's pronounced like the English word "ma" (meaning "mother"). In other words, it sounds like ma in "mark."

In romaji, write ma.

HOW TO REMEMBER ま

Removing your head? Doubling your hands and arms? What sort of evil magic is this? What makes it weirder is that your mama is the one doing this magic. Imagine your ma looking like this. Aghh!

PRACTICE WRITING ま



ま	ま	ま	ま				
ま	ま	ま	ま				

み

み

HOW TO PRONOUNCE み

み is just the M sound plus い, making a mi sound.

It's pronounced like the English word "me." In other words, it sounds like mee in "meet."

In romaji, write mi.

HOW TO REMEMBER み

Looks like lucky number 21. Who just hit the blackjack? Me! Who just turned 21 as well? Me!!

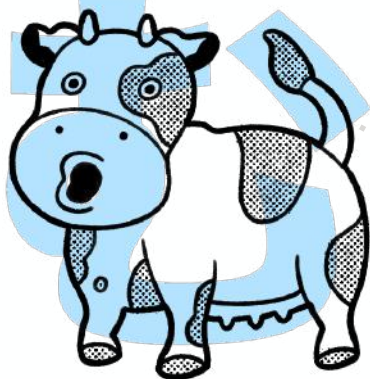
Listen to me sing my own birthday song... mi mi Mi MIIIIIIII!

PRACTICE WRITING み



み	み	み	み				
み	み	み	み				

む



HOW TO PRONOUNCE む

む is just the M sound plus う, making a mu sound.

It's pronounced like what cows say in English: "moo." In other words, it sounds like moo in "mood."

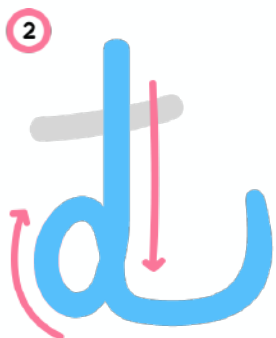
In romaji, write mu.

HOW TO REMEMBER む

"Mooooo," says the cow.

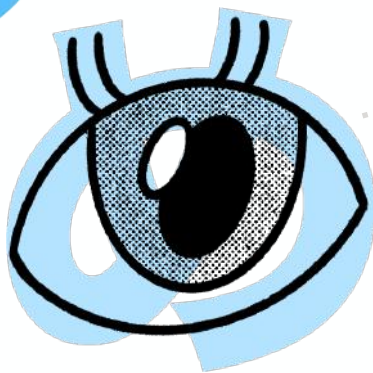
"MOOOOOOO."

PRACTICE WRITING む



む	む	む	む				
む	む	む	む				

め



HOW TO PRONOUNCE め

め is just the M sound plus え, making a me sound.

It's pronounced like me in "mess."

In romaji, write me.

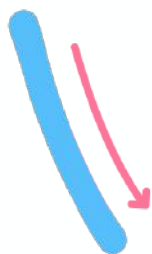
HOW TO REMEMBER め

Look at that beautiful eye! It's so beautiful because of the makeup on it. Gotta look pretty in the eyes, or else your ensemble will just be "meh."

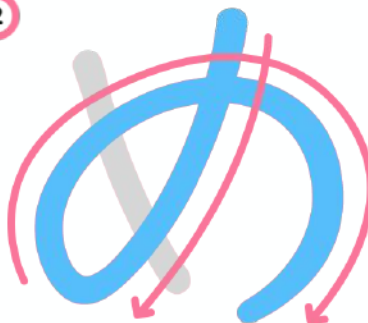
If you also happen to know the word for "eye" in Japanese, that will help too. The word for "eye" in Japanese is just め (me).

PRACTICE WRITING め

①

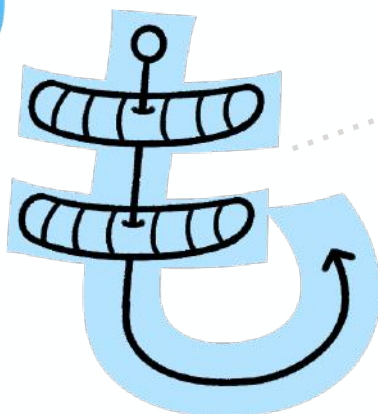


②



め	め	め	め				
め	め	め	め				

も



HOW TO PRONOUNCE も

も is just the M sound plus お, making a mo sound.

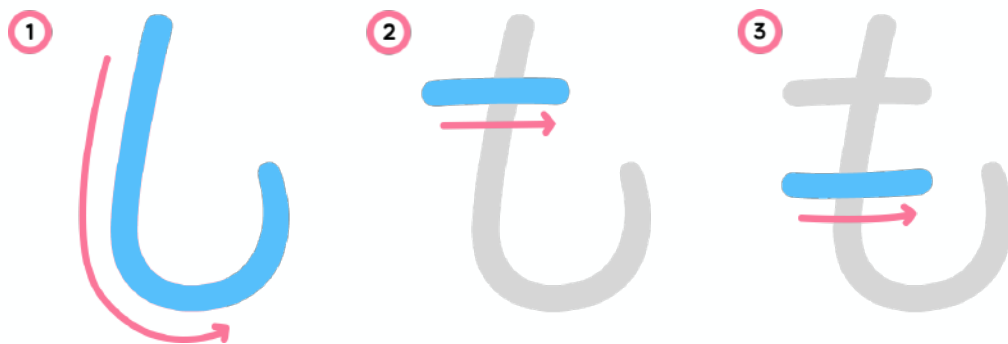
It's pronounced like mo in "more."

In romaji, write mo.

HOW TO REMEMBER も

You want to catch more fish, so you add more worms to your hook.

PRACTICE WRITING も



LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

む	め	も	ま	み	も	ま	み	む	め



ま	え

まえ means forward.



み	み

みみ means ear.



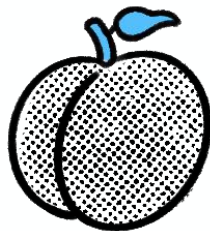
む	し

むし means bug.



め

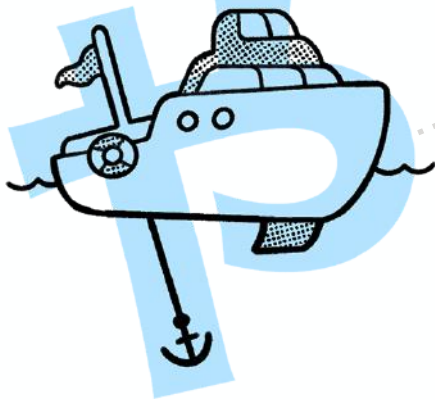
め means eye.



も	も

もも means peach.

や



HOW TO PRONOUNCE や

や is just the Y sound plus あ, making a ya sound. It's pronounced like ya in "yacht." In British English, it sounds more like ya in "yak."

In romaji, write ya.

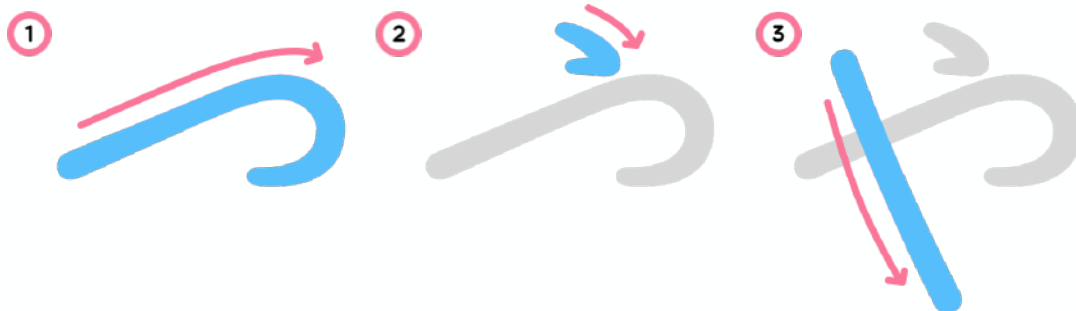
HOW TO REMEMBER や

See how this kana looks like a yacht with an anchor going down? It's even got a little flag on the rear... how cute.

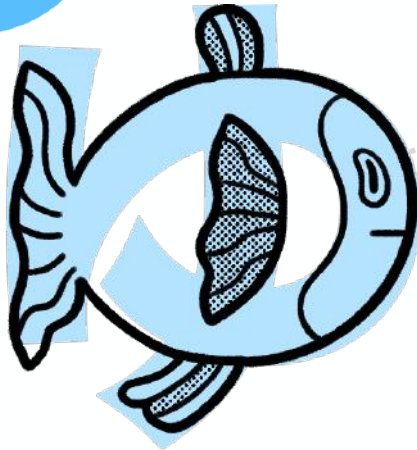
Alternatively, you can think of this as the face of a yak too!



PRACTICE WRITING や



ゆ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ゆ

ゆ is just the y sound plus う, making a yu sound. It's pronounced like the English word "you."

In romaji, write yu.

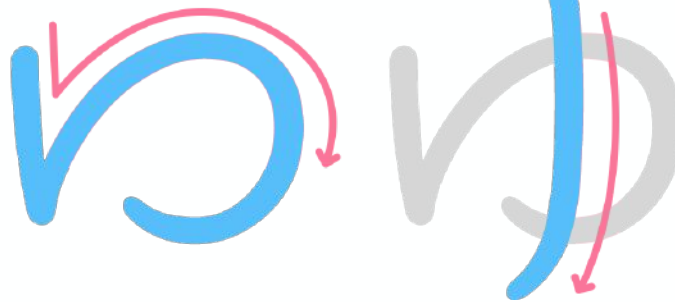
HOW TO REMEMBER ゆ

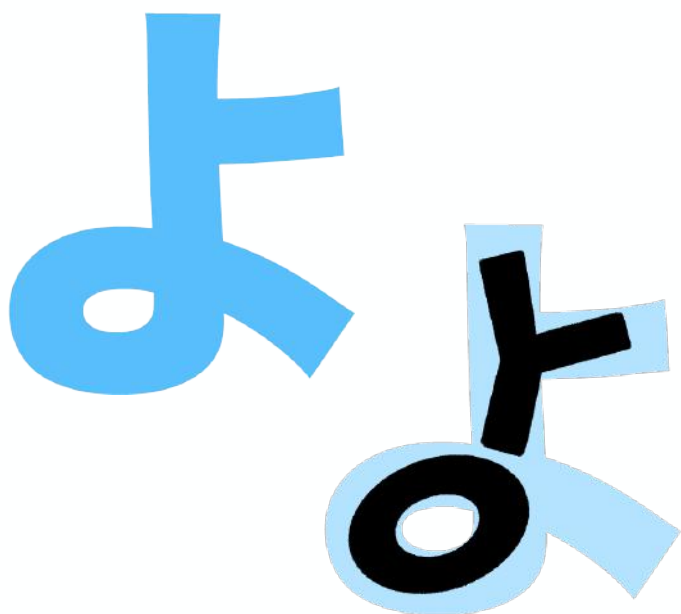
This kana is a very unique looking fish! It looks like a big eyeball swimming in the water. What's it looking at? You, you big goofball! Isn't it weird how fish always look like they're staring at you?

PRACTICE WRITING ゆ

1

2





HOW TO PRONOUNCE よ

よ is just the Y sound plus お, making a yo sound.

It's pronounced like yo in "yo-yo." In British English, it's more like yo in "yonder."

In romaji, write yo.

HOW TO REMEMBER よ

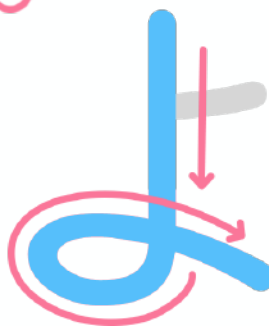
Yo, this kana looks like the letters Y & O! And look, you can even play yo-yo with it. Look at it slide down and back up again... it's mesmerizing, yo.

PRACTICE WRITING よ

①



②



ONLY THREE KANA IN THE Y-COLUMN?

It was a lot quicker going through the Y-column, right?

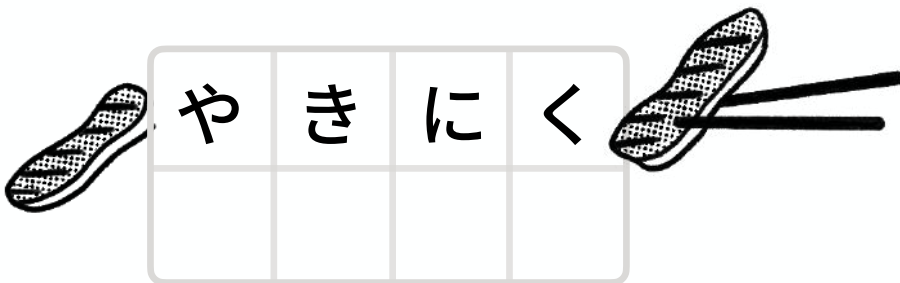
That's because there are only three kana in this column, while the other columns had five kana each. You might've noticed ye and yi are seemingly missing.

Actually, they used to exist, but now they don't (instead, people use い or え, because they sound pretty similar). So don't worry — you only have to learn three characters in the Y-column.

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

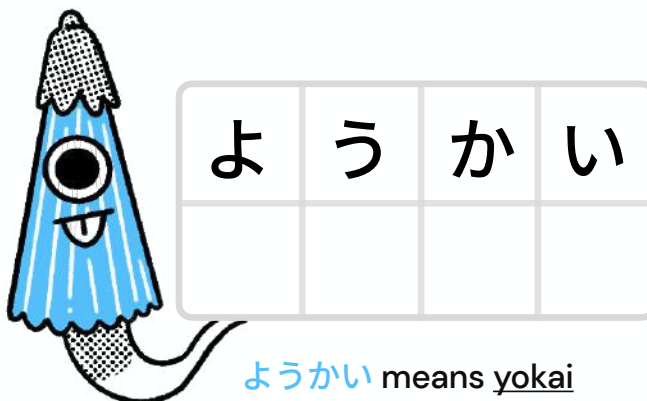
よ	や	ゆ	よ	よ	ゆ	や	よ	ゆ	や



やきにく means grilled meat.



ゆき means snow.



ようかい means yokai
(folktale creatures).

ら



HOW TO REMEMBER ら

ら looks like a rabbit that's standing and facing left. Look at its big droopy ears. So cute!

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ら

ら is just the R / L sound plus あ, making a ra / la sound.

ら is pronounced like a combination of "rah rah" (like cheering) and "la la la" (like singing!).

It's a bit hard to explain with English examples, because the R-column sounds are kind of a mixture of r, l, and d sounds. For more details about R-column sounds, check the [How To Pronounce The Japanese "R" Sound](#) article and video on tofugu.com.

However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ra.

PRACTICE WRITING ら

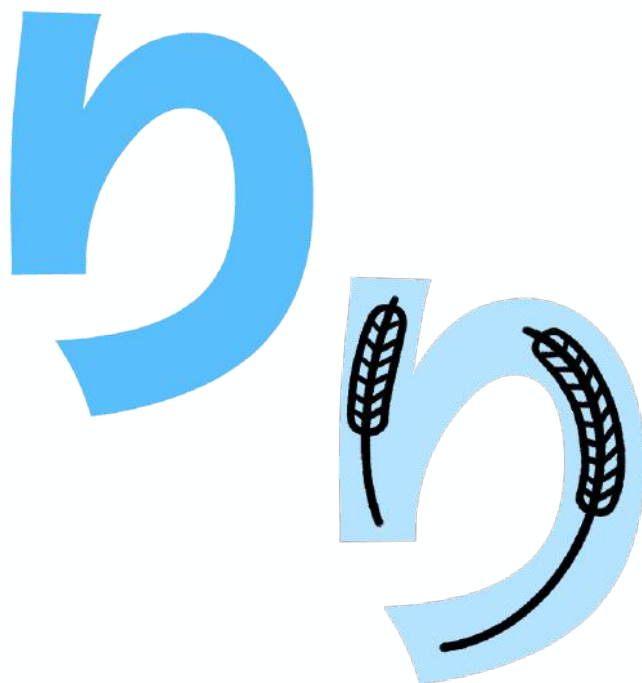
①



②



ら	ら	ら	ら				
ら	ら	ら	ら				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE り

り is just the R / L sound plus い, making a ri / li sound.

り is pronounced like a combination of ree in "reed" and lee in "leek."

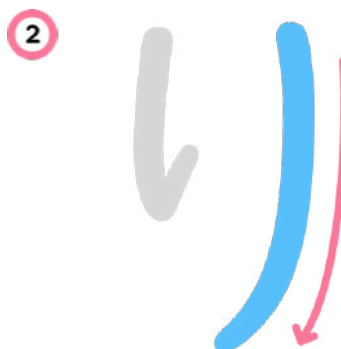
However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ri.

HOW TO REMEMBER り

The reeds are swaying in the wind.

This kana is also commonly written without the connection in the middle, like り, which looks even more reed-like.

PRACTICE WRITING り



1 り	2 り	り	り				
り	り	り	り				

る



HOW TO PRONOUNCE る

る is just the R / L sound plus う, making a ru / lu sound.

It's pronounced like a combination of ru in "rule" or "route" and loo in "loop."

However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ru.

HOW TO REMEMBER る

This is just ろ (which you will learn in a sec) with a loop at the end.

る is a crazier route. Why? Because there's a loop at the end.

PRACTICE WRITING る



る	る	る	る				
る	る	る	る				

れ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE れ

れ is just the R / L sound plus え, making a re / le sound.

れ is pronounced like a combination of re in "rech" and le in "led."

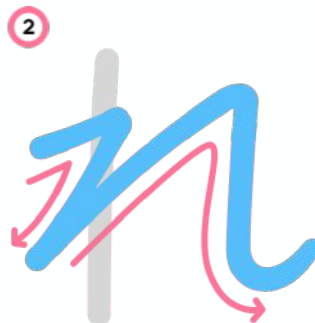
However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write re.

HOW TO REMEMBER れ

This looks like a guy kneeling on the ground, retching up his dinner.

This kana is similar to め, わ, む, and ね. What makes this one different is the curve at the back. You can identify this as the guy's knees bending, which makes it clear that he's keeled over retching his guts out.

PRACTICE WRITING れ



れ	れ	れ	れ
れ	れ	れ	れ

ろ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ろ

ろ is just the R / L sound plus ろ, making a ro / lo sound.

ろ is pronounced like a combination of ro in "road" and lo in "load." In British English, it's more like ro in "rot" or lo in "long."

However, to type or write it in romaji, use r and write ro.

HOW TO REMEMBER ろ

This is the counterpart to れ, except this one doesn't have a loop at the end. So this kana is just a plain old road.

PRACTICE WRITING ろ

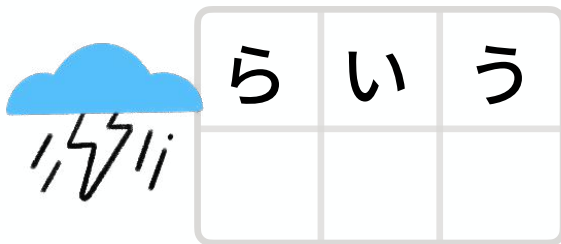


ろ	ろ	ろ	ろ				
ろ	ろ	ろ	ろ				

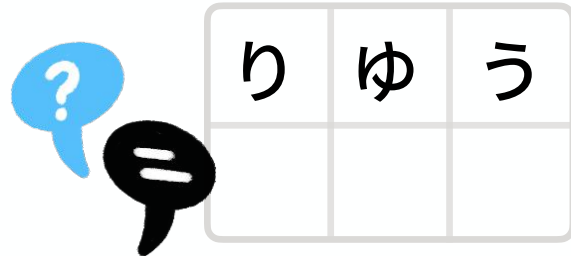
LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

り	ら	ろ	る	れ	り	ろ	る	ら	れ



らいう means thunderstorm.



りゆう means reason.



るす means absent.



れきし means history.



ろうそく means candle.

わ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE わ

わ is just the W sound plus あ, making a wa sound.

It's pronounced like wa in "wasabi."

In romaji, write wa.

HOW TO REMEMBER わ

This kana looks like a wasp flying straight up.

It looks similar to れ, ん, ね, and め. And it looks especially similar to ね. You know ね is Nelly the cat because of the curl of the tail on the end. So you can imagine the cat chasing this wasp, which is why it's flying straight up to get away. Its butt is also a straight, sharp line. This is its stinger!

PRACTICE WRITING わ

①



②

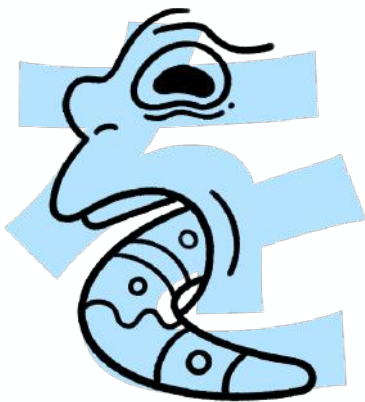


わ	わ	わ	わ
わ	わ	わ	わ

を

NOTE:

Why two kana for the o sound? Unlike お, を is primarily used as a grammar element called a "particle." It marks the object of a sentence.



HOW TO PRONOUNCE を

を is pronounced like o in "origami" — just like the vowel お. It used to be pronounced like "wo," but now it sounds exactly like お.

In romaji, both o or wo are used for を. To type it, write wo.

HOW TO REMEMBER を

"Whoa!" yells the guy with no chin. Someone threw a boomerang into his mouth! That's pretty "whoa"—worthy, I think.

PRACTICE WRITING を



	を	を	を	を				
を	を	を	を					

ん

NOTE:

Despite being introduced in the W-column, ん has nothing to do with W. It just doesn't belong anywhere else, and the W-column had some extra space. Simple as that.

ん

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ん

ん is just the N sound — that's it. It's the only kana that consists of a single consonant. It's pronounced like the ending n sound in "pen."

In romaji, write n. To type it, you sometimes have to type nn. Type double ns, especially before vowels and y, so that it won't turn into another kana that starts with n.

HOW TO REMEMBER ん

This kana looks just like a lowercase n in English. They happen to be the same sounds as well. How convenient! nnn ん ん ん.

PRACTICE WRITING ん

①



ん	ん	ん	ん				
ん	ん	ん	ん				

WELL, THE W-COLUMN WAS STRANGE!

As you could tell, the w-column is a bit weird.

The first character is as you'd expect, but the other two are curveballs — like the notes on each character explained.

Anyhoo, this was the last column for basic hiragana characters. Congrats! Do some practice below to learn these irregular characters.

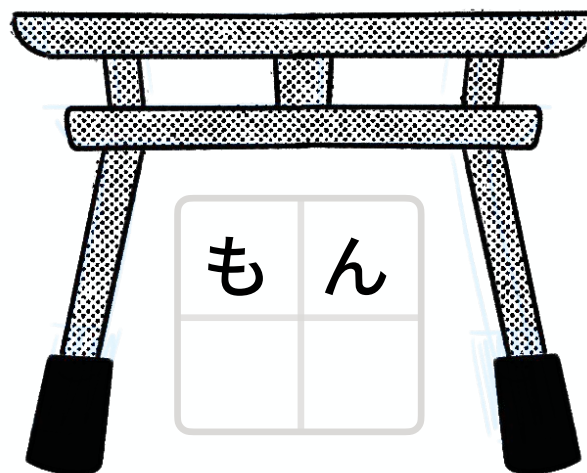
LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

を	ん	わ	ん	わ	を	ん	ん	わ	を



わらう means to laugh.



もん means gate.

LET'S PRACTICE READING KATAKANA FROM M - Y - R - W ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

れ	る	わ	り	も	ん	よ	ろ	ゆ	ま

み	や	め	る	む	ら	ろ	め	れ	ん

ろ	ま	れ	ん	も	ま	り	ゆ	よ	ら

る	り	ら	を	ん	も	ま	む	り	ん

ら	わ	ゆ	や	も	み	れ	ん	よ	め

れ	ま	め	ん	ら	よ	り	ら	わ	を

LEARN VARIATION HIRAGANA

Congratulations! You've learned all the basic hiragana. Now it's time for you to learn about "variation" hiragana. Don't worry — you've done all the heavy lifting at this point. As long as you know the basic hiragana, learning beyond the basics is easy.

DAKUTEN & HAN-DAKUTEN

Dakuten is a symbol that looks like this → ` . Looks like a double quotation mark, right? This dakuten symbol marks hiragana from certain consonant columns and changes their pronunciation. It turns the consonant into a "voiced" or "vibrating" sound, which just means your vocal cords vibrate when the sound is made.

For example, with dakuten added, a K-sound becomes a G-sound. That means か (KA) becomes が (GA), き (KI) becomes ぎ (GI), and so on — like the chart below shows.

	K → G		S → Z		T → D		H → B	
あ A	か KA	が GA	さ SA	ざ ZA	た TA	だ DA	は HA	ば BA
い I	き KI	ぎ GI	し SHI	じ JI	ち CHI	ぢ JI (DI)	ひ HI	び BI
う U	く KU	ぐ GU	す SU	ず ZU	つ TSU	づ ZU (DU)	ふ FU	ぶ BU
え E	け KE	げ GE	せ SE	ぜ ZE	て TE	で DE	へ HE	べ BE
お O	こ KO	ご GO	そ SO	ぞ ZO	と TO	ど DO	ほ HO	ぼ BO

In the same manner, S-sounds become Z-sounds, T-sounds become D-sounds, and H-sounds become B-sounds. Note that "exception" kana like し (SHI) act a little differently. With dakuten, し becomes じ — JI instead of ZI. Also, be aware that on this chart, romaji in parentheses indicate how to type a character if its keyboard input differs from its reading. To type ぢ on your keyboard, you'll type DI, for example, but the pronunciation is still JI.

You've just learned about basic dakuten, but there's actually another variety called "han-dakuten" — indicated by a circular symbol that looks like this → ° . They are phonetically voiceless sounds: unlike voiced sounds (dakuten sounds), your vocal cords don't vibrate when you make them.

It sounds complicated, but should be easy to remember — the han-dakuten can only mark H-sounds and always turns them into P-sounds!

は (HA) - ひ (HI) - ふ (FU) - へ (HE) - ほ (HO) become
ぱ (PA) - ぴ (PI) - ぷ (PU) - ぺ (PE) - ぽ (PO).

Pretty straightforward, right?

H → P	
は HA	ぱ PA
ひ HI	ぴ PI
ふ FU	ぷ PU
へ HE	ぺ PE
ほ HO	ぽ PO

... "Now, how do I remember all this?" Don't worry. Here are some memory hints a.k.a. mnemonics to help you remember the dakuten/han-dakuten conversions.

K → G The car (か) runs into the guard (が) rail.

S → Z My saw (さ) just zapped (ざ) me when I tried to use it.

T → D "TADA!" (た & だ)

H → B You're saying "hahaha (は)" at the bar (ば) because you've been drinking too much.

H → P You say "hahaha (は)" so much at the bar that somebody punches (ぱ) you.

Now that we've learned about dakuten and han-dakuten, let's practice (and try not to cheat, of course)!

ひ	が	ぜ	ざ	べ	ぶ	ど	ぞ	ぎ	ぺ	げ
ず	ば	ぽ	ち	で	づ	ぐ	だ	じ	が	ぼ

COMBINATION HIRAGANA

You can combine different types of kana to make some new sounds. Here are the two types of kana you'll be putting together:

1) Kana from the い (I) row.

In other words, kana that end with an I-sound when written in romaji:

き (KI) - し (SHI) - ち (CHI) - に (NI) - ひ (HI) - み (MI) - り (RI),

ぎ (GI) - じ (JI) - ぢ (JI) - び (BI) - ぴ (PI). Note the vowel い itself won't apply here!

2) The small や - ゆ - よ.

The small versions of や (YA) - ゆ (YU) - よ (YO).

Look closely to see how they're almost half the size of the regular kana!

や や

ゆ ゆ

よ よ

For example, き + よ = きよ (KYO). し + や = しゃ (SHA). び + ゆ = びゆ (BYU).

Notice that the い at the end of the first kana is dropped when you spell the combination in romaji. You'll also drop the I-sound when you pronounce these combination kana.

Now let's practice!

しゅ	ぎゃ	みよ	しよ	きゅ	りゃ	じゃ	ぴよ	ちゅ	みゃ
きよ	しゃ	りゅ	びゃ	にゅ	ちゃ	にゃ	ぢよ	りよ	じゅ

SMALL っ (QUICK PAUSE)

We also have a small version of つ (TSU), which looks like this → っ. This kana doesn't have a sound. Instead, it adds a quick little pause before a consonant sound in a word.

To express this in romaji, the consonant after a small っ is written twice.

Let's take a look at an example:

Add a small っ between the two kana い (I) and か (KA) to make the word いっか. In this case, you're doubling the K-sound, because that's the consonant following the small っ. So いっか is written IKKA — which is how you pronounce いっか as well as how you type it.

りったい RITTAI
/rit_tai/

かっこ KAKKO
/kak_ko/

いった ITTA
/it_ta/

Practice reading words with the small っ !

いっしょ	しっぽ	がっき	にっき	まっか
けっか	おっと	わっか	べっぷ	きって

... and that's it! You've learned everything in the book.

Now let's wrap up and practice reading all the different kinds of hiragana that you've learned!

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE HIRAGANA!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

む	さ	し	ぶ	きゃ	う	へ	ろ	じ	ぽ

い	め	ち	る	よ	ご	た	ん	も	く

そ	て	か	ぬ	つ	わ	しゅ	り	ぐ	ふ

せ	ぎゅ	に	と	き	こ	あ	す	な	を

う	ぶ	や	お	み	ぴょ	ぢ	ほ	ら	み

れ	け	え	す	じょ	ら	ぴ	ゆ	ずっと

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE HIRAGANA!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

りんご

すみっこ

ひかり

きもち

くだもの

おちゃわん

ひだり

くし

えんぴつ

あした

るりいろ

はる

きいろ

べんきょうする

まるい

かばん

ほんだな

わたあめ

けっぺいだ

しょくぶつ

いちご

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE HIRAGANA!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

みまもる

じょうだん

こっち

した

ゆり

えんそく

きょうかしょ

みる

かいじゅう

まんがか

りそう

ざっし

ぎゅうたん

おつかれさまです

びょういん

まんげきょう

ざいたく

ひょうげん

しゅるい

りょうようじょ

どりよく

WHAT'S NEXT?

Here are some recommendations for what you can do to keep moving forward with your Japanese proficiency.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE

Ready for more practice? Tofugu has an online quiz tool to assess and quiz your hiragana knowledge, so visit <https://kana-quiz.tofugu.com> for additional practice! And don't be stressed about mastering hiragana right now. Spacing your practice is really important for retaining knowledge in the long term. So while you continue to study hiragana, you can also start working on other parts of Japanese, like learning katakana and kanji. They're the other characters used in the Japanese writing system.

LEARN KATAKANA

Katakana is similar to hiragana in that each character represents a sound. It's used mainly for loanwords. If you liked learning hiragana through this book, check out [Tofugu's Learn Katakana Guide](#) as well!

LEARN KANJI (& JAPANESE VOCABULARY)

Tofugu has an online platform for learning kanji (characters of Chinese origin) and Japanese vocabulary called WaniKani (wanikani.com).

Kanji can be intimidating, because they're complicated and unfamiliar to a lot of learners. But WaniKani makes it easy by breaking them down into parts and giving you memory hints (a.k.a. mnemonics) to help you associate their shapes with their meanings and readings.

WaniKani also uses SRS (Spaced Repetition System) for its flashcard feature. It automatically spaces out your practice so that everything you learn sticks better to your brain. You can learn about 2,000 kanji and more than 6,000 words using WaniKani. If you're fast, you can do that in a little over a year! Try the first three levels for free and see if it works for you.

...This is the end of Tofugu's Learn Hiragana Book. We hope to see you around on your Japanese learning journey!

カ タ カ ナ
カ タ カ ナ
カ タ カ ナ
カ タ カ ナ
カ タ カ ナ

Learn Katakana

by TOFUGU



WHAT IS KATAKANA ?

Katakana are a type of Japanese character. Just like hiragana, each katakana character is used to represent a sound. In fact, they represent the exact same sounds as hiragana. So how are they different, you ask? The difference is in when you use them. Katakana are used for various purposes, but they're mostly used to transcribe foreign words (often English). Sometimes, katakana are used for stylistic purposes as well.

In this book, we assume that you already know how to read hiragana. If you haven't studied hiragana, please check out [Tofugu's Learn Hiragana page](#) first and come back later.

AN OVERVIEW OF KATAKANA

Just like hiragana, katakana start with the vowel column (A - I - U - E - O). The others are a combination of a consonant and a vowel sound, with an exception of ん (N).

	K	S	T	N	H	M	Y	R	W
ア A	カ KA	サ SA	タ TA	ナ NA	ハ HA	マ MA	ヤ YA	ラ RA	ワ WA
イ I	キ KI	シ SHI	チ CHI	ニ NI	ヒ HI	ミ MI		リ RI	
ウ U	ク KU	ス SU	ツ TSU	ヌ NU	フ FU	ム MU	ユ YU	ル RU	ヲ O
エ E	ケ KE	セ SE	テ TE	ネ NE	ヘ HE	メ ME		レ RE	
オ O	コ KO	ソ SO	ト TO	ノ NO	ホ HO	モ MO	ヨ YO	ロ RO	ン N

HOW TO USE THE LEARN KATAKANA BOOK

PAGE FOR EACH KATAKANA

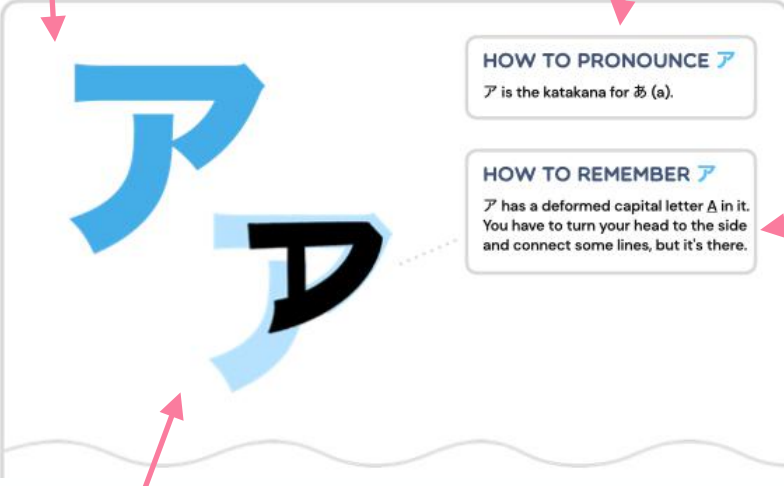
This is the kana (katakana) you'll be learning on the page.

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ア
ア is the katakana for あ (a).

HOW TO REMEMBER ア
ア has a deformed capital letter A in it. You have to turn your head to the side and connect some lines, but it's there.

THE HOW TO PRONOUNCE section explains how to say the kana. In this book, we'll be using the hiragana equivalents to tell you what the katakana sound like. So make sure you already know hiragana!

THE HOW TO REMEMBER section gives you a "memory hint," a.k.a. a mnemonic, to help you link the shape and the reading of the kana.

The diagram shows the katakana character 'ア' in blue. A red arrow points to the character from the text 'This is the kana (katakana) you'll be learning on the page.' Another red arrow points from the 'HOW TO PRONOUNCE' box to the character. A third red arrow points from the 'HOW TO REMEMBER' box to the character. The character is shown with a deformed capital letter 'A' inside it, which is the memory hint.

This is a supplemental image to the **HOW TO REMEMBER** section. It visually illustrates how the memory hint works.

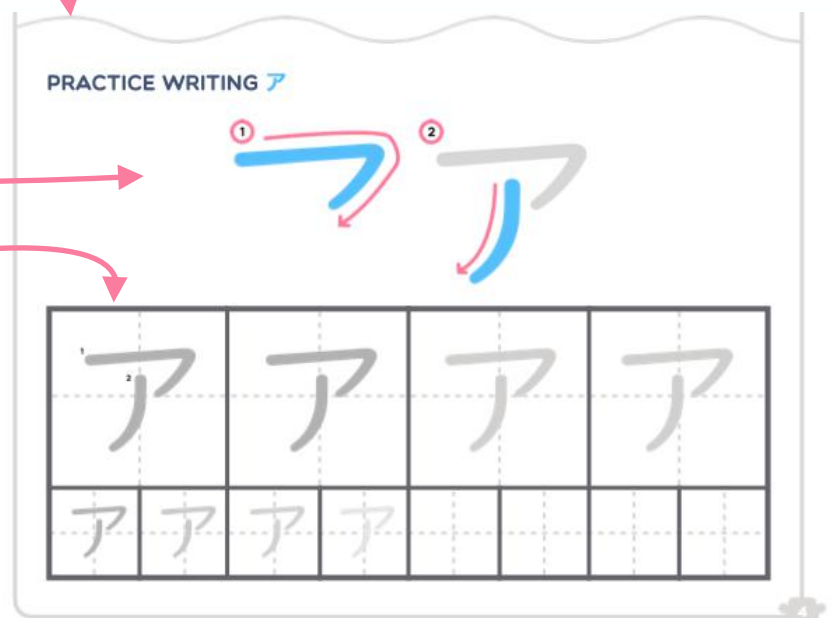
This shows the stroke order for writing the kana. As for stroke direction, keep in mind that the basic rule is left to right, top to bottom.

Do some practice writing the kana, tracing over the lines first, then filling in the blank boxes! At this stage, writing is not as important as being able to read, but moving your hand and practicing writing will help you remember the kana.

The bottom half of the page is the **PRACTICE WRITING** section.

PRACTICE WRITING ア

1 2

The practice writing section shows the stroke order for writing the katakana character 'ア'. It includes a diagram with numbered arrows (1 and 2) indicating the direction of the strokes. Below the diagram is a grid of boxes for tracing and writing. The first row contains four boxes, each with a dashed outline of the character 'ア' for tracing. The second row contains four boxes with dashed outlines and four empty boxes for independent practice.

REVIEW PAGE FOR EACH COLUMN

After you learn a set/column of kana, you'll see a page called **LET'S PRACTICE READING!** where you can review what you've learned. You'll see this kind of exercise once in a while throughout the book so that you can repeatedly review your katakana knowledge and solidify it in your memory.

LET'S PRACTICE READING!
What's the reading? Write in romaji.

エ	ア	イ	エ	オ	ウ	ア	イ	オ	ウ



ア

ア! means ah! — something you say when you come to a realization.



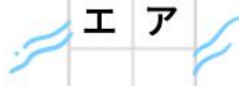
ア	イ

アイ is eye.



ウ	イ

ウイ is "Oui" ("Yes" in French).



エ	ア

エア is air.

オ	ア



オア is "or."

Here in the boxes below each kana, just fill in the romaji reading of the corresponding kana.

This helps you self-assess and see how much you have (or haven't) retained.

If you find yourself having a hard time remembering a specific kana, you can always go back to that kana's page to review.

You can also try to come up with memory hints of your own if that works better for you!

The reading quiz continues! Keep filling in the kana readings in romaji.

What's different (and kind of cool) in this part is that the kana are used for transcribing non-Japanese words (and sometimes Japanese words that are just commonly written in katakana). You might notice that a lot of katakana words don't actually sound like the way they do in their original language. This is because of the lack of sounds available in Japanese compared to other languages. But it's cool to know that you can say some foreign words using Japanese sounds, right?

Each word contains at least one kana from the column you're reviewing, but keep in mind that you may see some kana from previous columns being used as well.

So when you're using this book, try to follow the order it's in to get the most out of it.

ア

ア

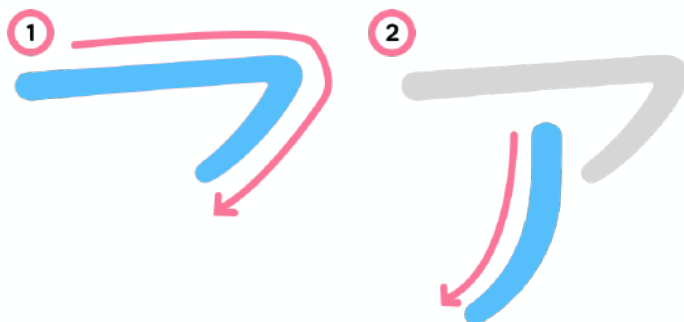
HOW TO PRONOUNCE ア

ア is the katakana for あ (a).

HOW TO REMEMBER ア

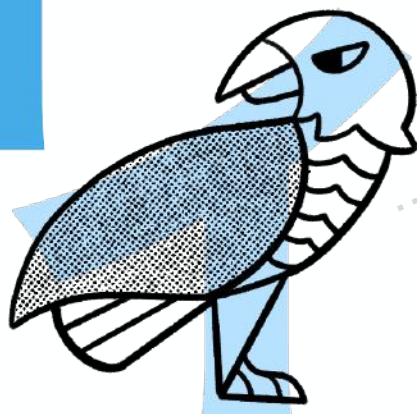
ア has a deformed capital letter A in it. You have to turn your head to the side and connect some lines, but it's there.

PRACTICE WRITING ア



1 ア	ア	ア	ア				
ア	ア	ア	ア				

イ



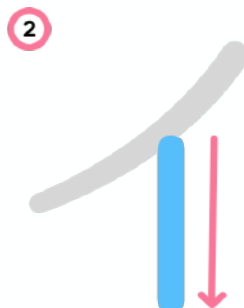
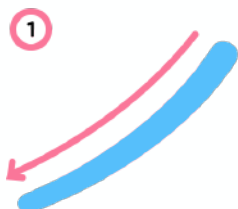
HOW TO PRONOUNCE イ

イ is the katakana for い (i).

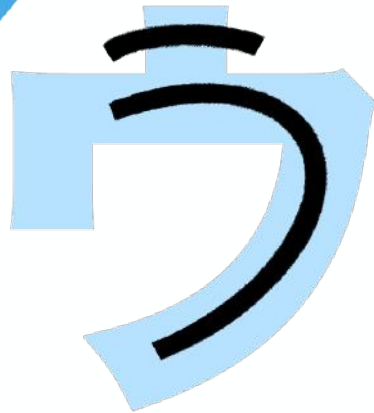
HOW TO REMEMBER イ

イ looks like an eagle standing on the ground, or on a branch, or wherever. See its legs and its back, curved down like an eagle's?

PRACTICE WRITING イ



ウ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ウ

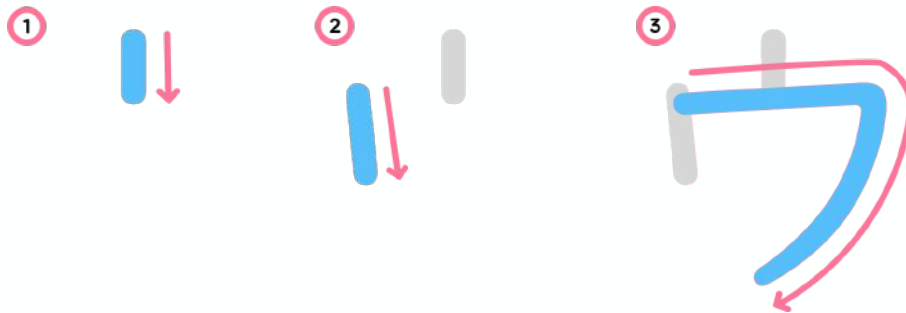
ウ is the katakana for う (u).

HOW TO REMEMBER ウ

This katakana character looks a lot like its hiragana counterpart: う.

It should be similar enough to use as a mnemonic to remember what it is.

PRACTICE WRITING ウ



ウ	ウ	ウ	ウ
ウ	ウ	ウ	ウ

工

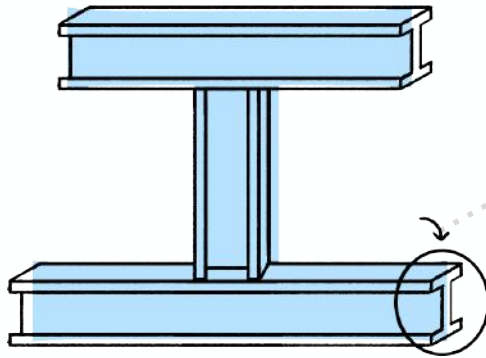
HOW TO PRONOUNCE 工

工 is the katakana for え (e).

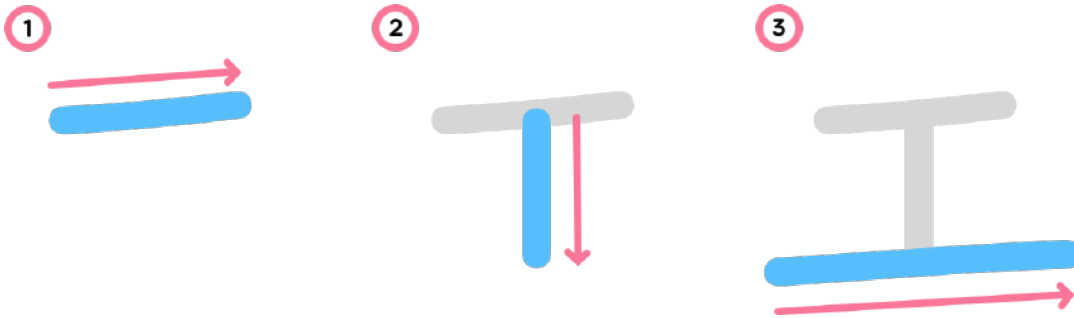
HOW TO REMEMBER 工

Imagine this is a girder an engineer would use to build buildings. This character is in the shape of the end of a girder, and it's made up of them too.

Or you can think of it like an elevator with its doors closed.



PRACTICE WRITING 工



オ



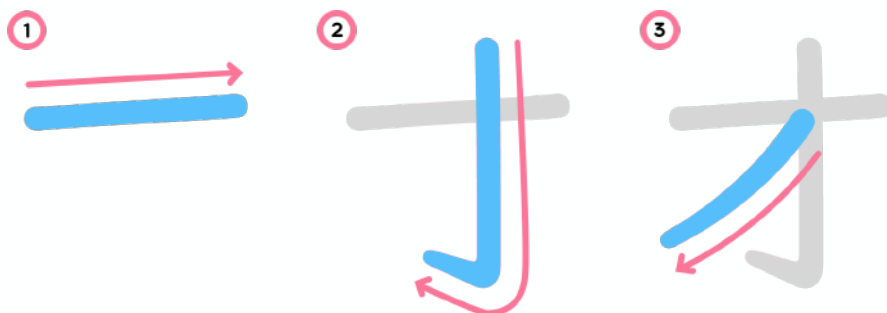
HOW TO PRONOUNCE オ

オ is the katakana for お (o).

HOW TO REMEMBER オ

This kana looks like an opera singer. His mouth is shaped like an o and he's singing "Ohhhh!"

PRACTICE WRITING オ



オ	オ	オ	オ
オ	オ	オ	オ

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

エ	ア	イ	エ	オ	ウ	ア	イ	オ	ウ



ア

ア! means ah! — something you say when you come to a realization.



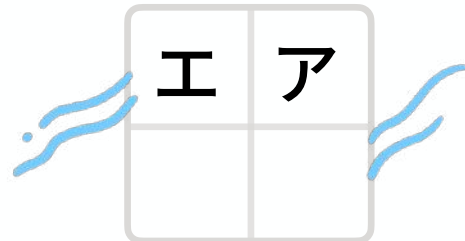
ア	イ

アイ is eye.



ウ	イ

ウイ is "Oui" ("Yes" in French).



エア is air.

オ	ア



オア is "or."

カ



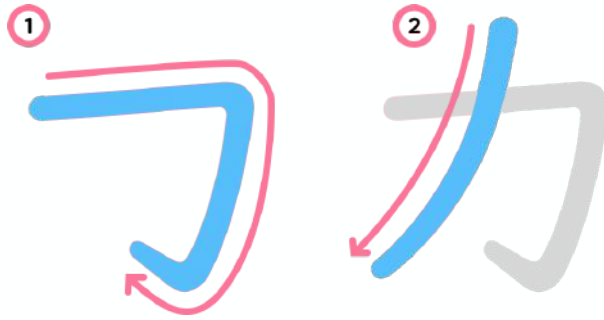
HOW TO PRONOUNCE カ

カ is the katakana for か (ka).

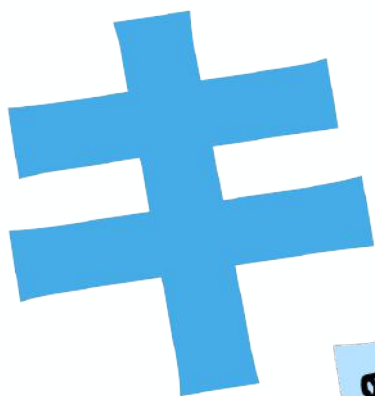
HOW TO REMEMBER カ

It looks just like the hiragana か, though it's missing that little extra line. Close enough to make it easy to remember, though.

PRACTICE WRITING カ



カ	カ	カ	カ
カ	カ	カ	カ



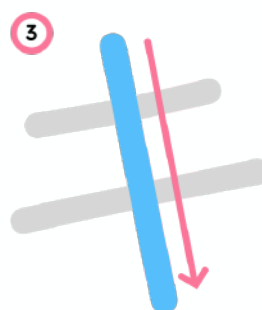
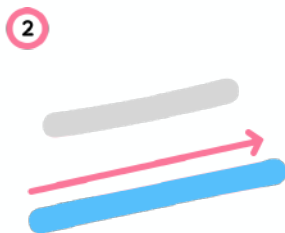
HOW TO PRONOUNCE

is the katakana for き (ki).

HOW TO REMEMBER

It looks like the hiragana き (the top part at least) and also looks like part of a weird key.

PRACTICE WRITING



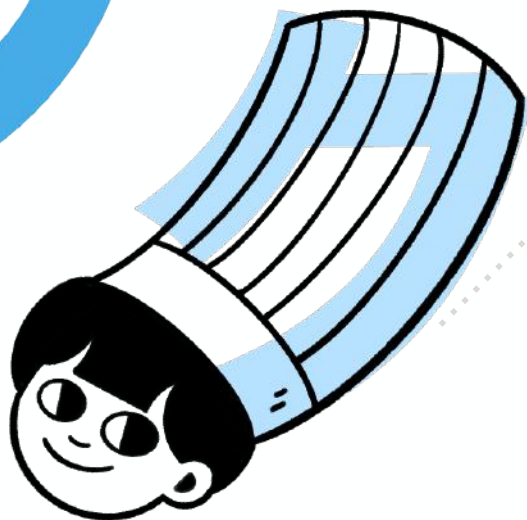
ク

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ク

ク is the katakana for く (ku).

HOW TO REMEMBER ク

This looks like a long cook's hat. What are they hiding under there?!



PRACTICE WRITING ク

①



②



ク	ク	ク	ク				
ク	ク	ク	ク				

ケ

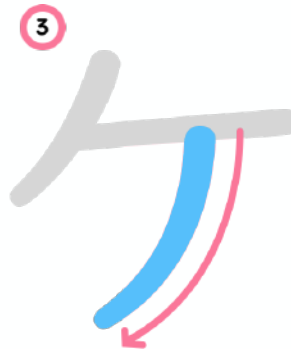
HOW TO PRONOUNCE ケ

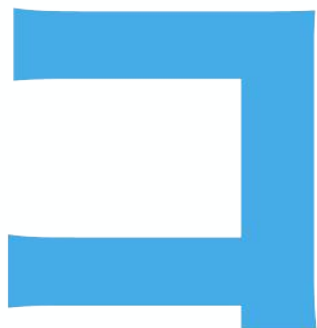
ケ is the katakana for け (ke).

HOW TO REMEMBER ケ

It looks like the letter K!

PRACTICE WRITING ケ



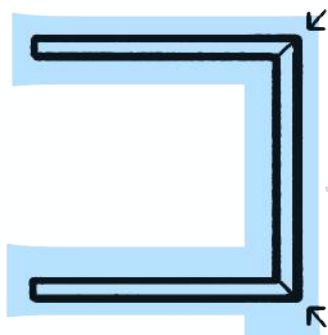


HOW TO PRONOUNCE コ

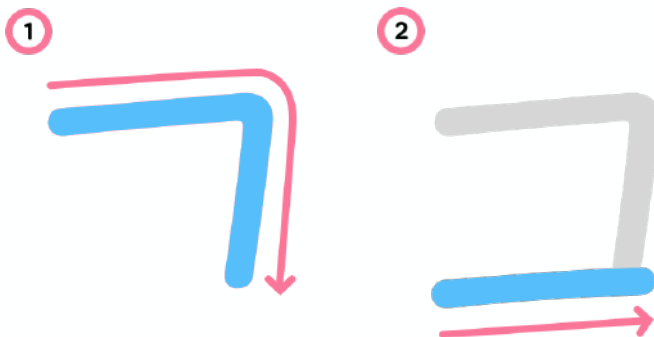
コ is the katakana for コ (ko).

HOW TO REMEMBER コ

See the two 90 degree corners? The two corners are what help you to remember that this is "ko."



PRACTICE WRITING コ



LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

キ	カ	ク	コ	ケ	ク	キ	カ	コ	ケ

*What's This Dash? : This dash extends the vowel that comes before it.
For example, カー is "kaa." (More on this later! p.64)*



カカオ is cacao.



キー is key.



アクア is aqua.

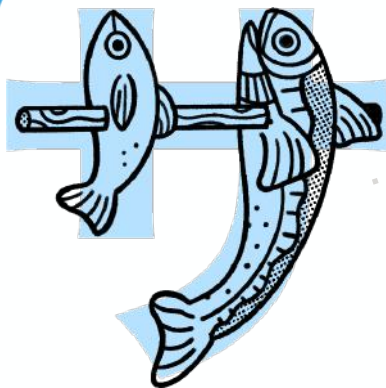


ケア is care.



コア is core.

サ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE サ

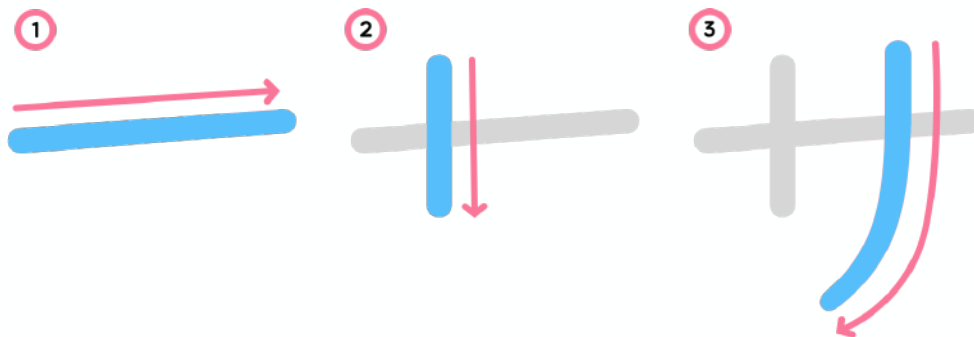
サ is the katakana for さ (sa).

HOW TO REMEMBER サ

Look at these two fish that are hanging on a skewer. The small one is a sardine and the bigger one is a salmon. You can tell that by the size difference.

You can also remember this is sa because fish are called さかな (sakana) in Japanese.

PRACTICE WRITING サ



サ	サ	サ	サ				
サ	サ	サ	サ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE シ

シ is the katakana for し (shi).

HOW TO REMEMBER シ

This kana looks like a smiley face, but something is wrong with it. Both eyes are sideways and stacked on top of each other like some deep sea fish. She has a very weird face.

PRACTICE WRITING シ



ス

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ス

ス is the katakana for す (su).

HOW TO REMEMBER ス

ス is the katakana for す (su).

What's that up there? It's Superman walking in the sky!

Wait — upon closer inspection, it's just his disembodied supersuit. ...W-Where the heck did he go naked?



PRACTICE WRITING ス



ス	ス	ス	ス				
ス	ス	ス	ス				

セ

せ

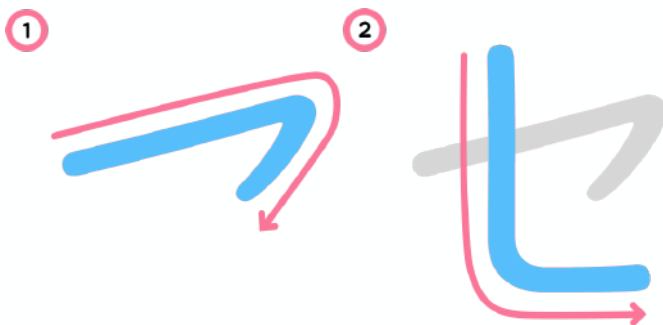
HOW TO PRONOUNCE セ

セ is the katakana for セ (se).

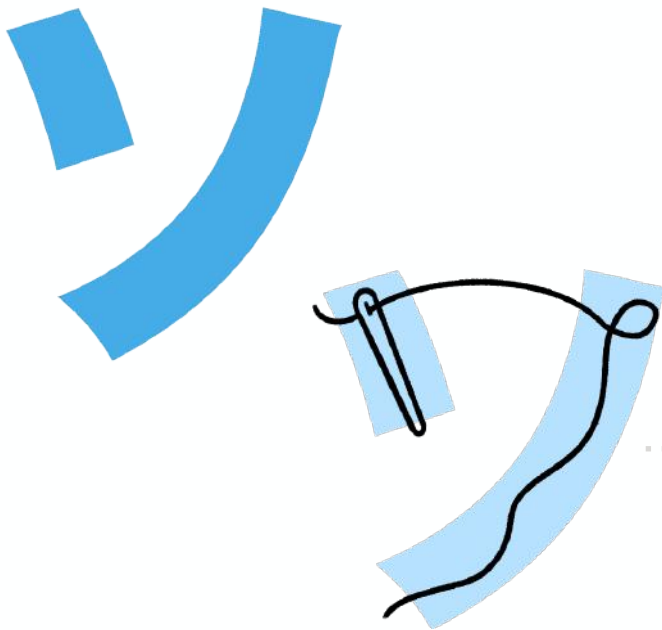
HOW TO REMEMBER セ

It looks really similar to the hiragana せ, so you should be able to use that to remember this kana.

PRACTICE WRITING セ



セ	セ	セ	セ				
セ	セ	セ	セ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ソ

ソ is the katakana for "so."

HOW TO REMEMBER ソ

It is one needle and a long thread, which you use to sew.

Remember, needles are always vertical like this needle, because you need to stab it through something, straight down. This will help you to differentiate this one and the very similar シ, the katakana for "n."

PRACTICE WRITING ソ

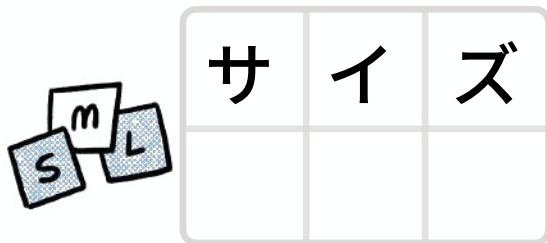


1 2							
ソ	ソ	ソ	ソ				

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

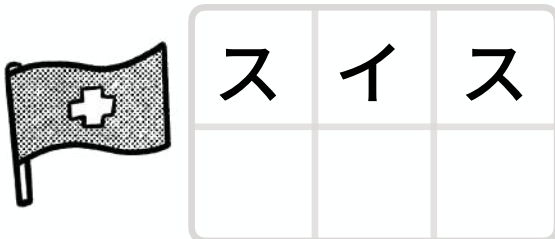
ソ	シ	サ	ス	セ	ソ	サ	シ	セ	ス



サイズ is size.



シアー is sheer.



スイス is Swiss.



セクシー is sexy.



ソイ is soy.

LET'S PRACTICE READING KATAKANA FROM A - K - S ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

サ	ス	オ	ケ	ス	カ	ウ	ク	ア	キ

シ	イ	コ	エ	ア	サ	オ	ス	ソ	イ

キ	セ	ク	エ	セ	ウ	ケ	オ	シ	ソ

ア	ス	ク	イ	キ	ク	ウ	ク	コ	セ

ス	イ	カ	ケ	ク	ウ	エ	サ	オ	シ

ウ	ソ	ス	シ	イ	キ	ク	カ	エ	ケ

タ



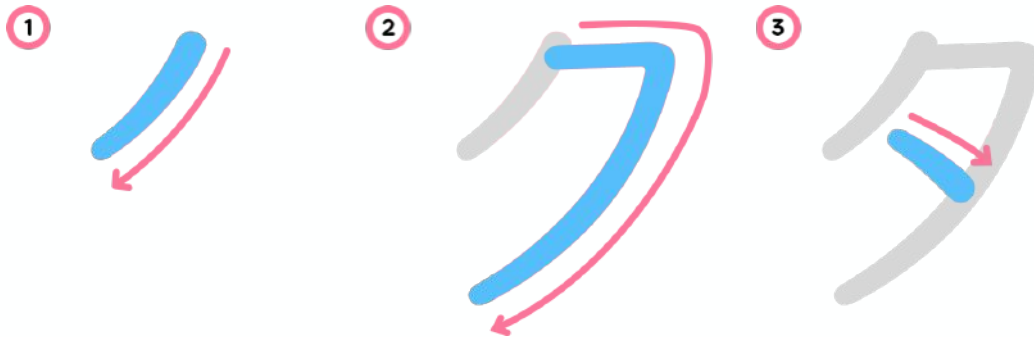
HOW TO PRONOUNCE タ

タ is the katakana for た (ta).

HOW TO REMEMBER タ

タ looks like a kite. Kites are called たこ (tako) in Japanese. This is actually a taco kite, too. It looks exactly like a giant taco flying high in the sky. Tacos are all the rage these days!

PRACTICE WRITING タ



タ	タ	タ	タ				
タ	タ	タ	タ				

チ



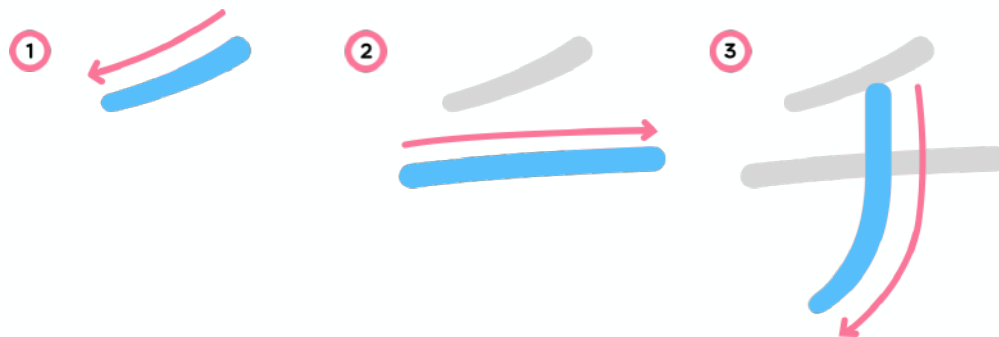
HOW TO PRONOUNCE チ

チ is the katakana for ち (chi).

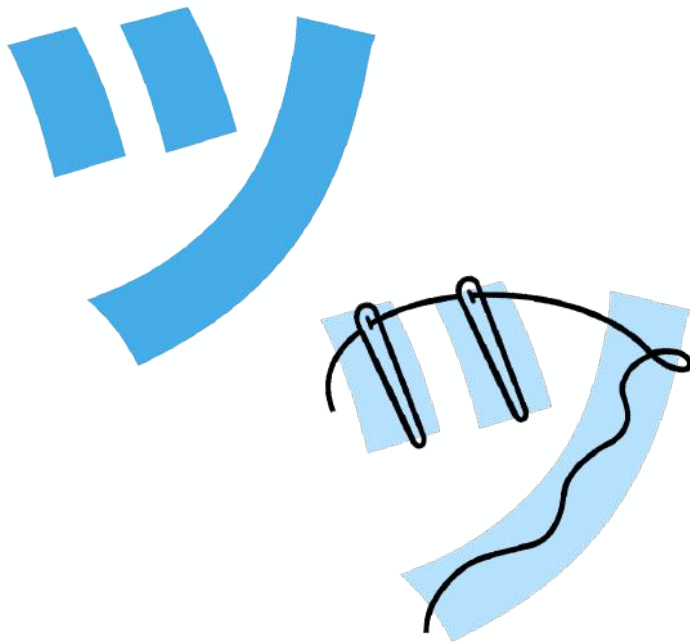
HOW TO REMEMBER チ

Doesn't this look like a cheerleader doing a cheer? Hope they don't fall over...

PRACTICE WRITING チ



チ	チ	チ	チ
チ	チ	チ	チ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ツ

ツ is the katakana for つ (tsu).

HOW TO REMEMBER ツ

While ソ (so) had one needle and thread, ツ has two needles and thread.

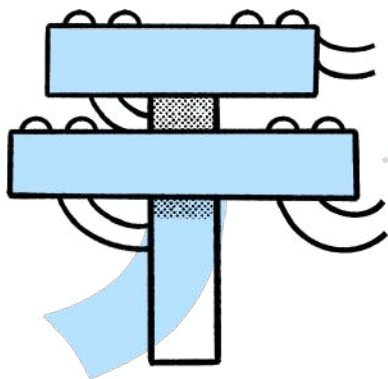
Remember, needles are vertical because you use them to stab into cloth, straight down. This will help you to differentiate this one from シ (shi), which has more horizontal lines. Horizontal lines means it's a face, vertical means it's needles. So this one has two needles.

PRACTICE WRITING ツ



1 2 3							

テ



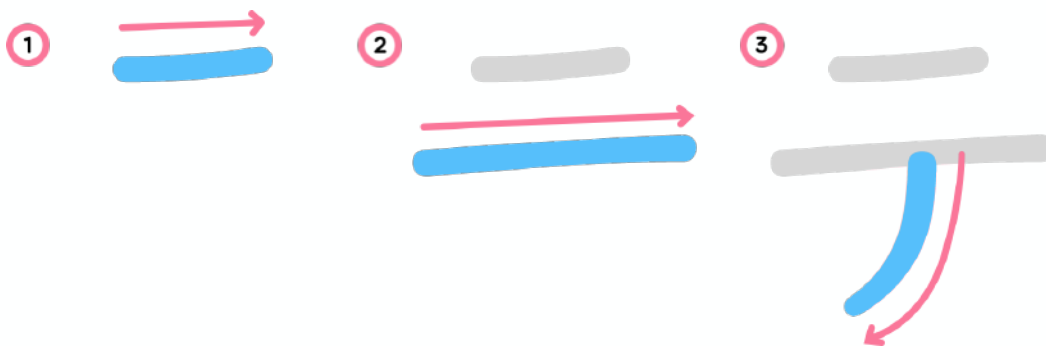
HOW TO PRONOUNCE テ

テ is the katakana for て (te).

HOW TO REMEMBER テ

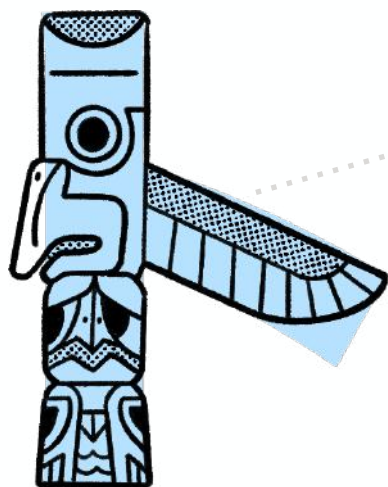
This kana looks like a telephone pole.

PRACTICE WRITING テ



1 2 3 テ	テ	テ	テ
テ	テ	テ	テ

ト



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ト

ト is the katakana for と (to).

HOW TO REMEMBER ト

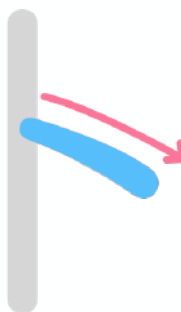
It looks just like a totem pole.

PRACTICE WRITING ト

1



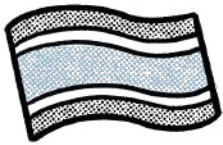
2



LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

チ	タ	ツ	テ	ト	チ	タ	ツ	テ	ト



タ	イ

タイ is Thai
("Thailand" in Japanese).



チ	ア

チア is cheer.



タ	イ	ツ

タイツ is tights.



ソ	テ	ー

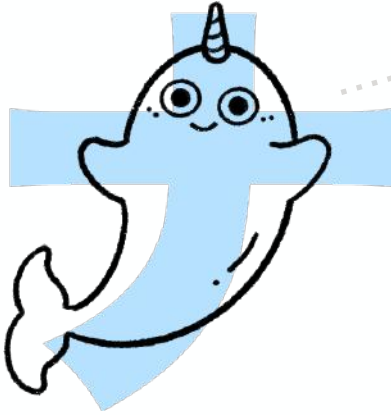
ソテー is sauté.



テ	ス	ト

テスト is test.

ナ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ナ

ナ is the katakana for な (na).

HOW TO REMEMBER ナ

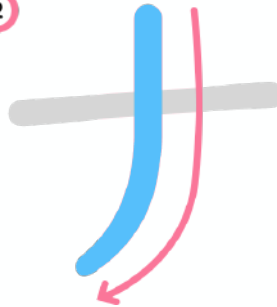
See the majestic narwhal, swimming up to the surface? What a beautiful creature.

PRACTICE WRITING ナ

①



②

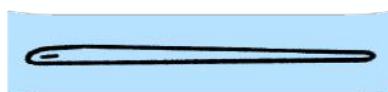


ナ	ナ	ナ	ナ				
ナ	ナ	ナ	ナ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ニ

ニ is the katakana for に (ni).



HOW TO REMEMBER ニ

This is two needles, laying on their side. Now, don't get confused about how I said that needles are always vertical... that's only with the katakana that have the slope in them (ㇿ and ㇾ). When they're on their own, resting, and not being used to sew anything (no thread), they're just two needles lying on their side.

PRACTICE WRITING ニ

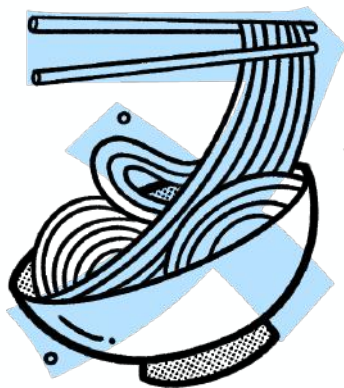
①



②



ヌ



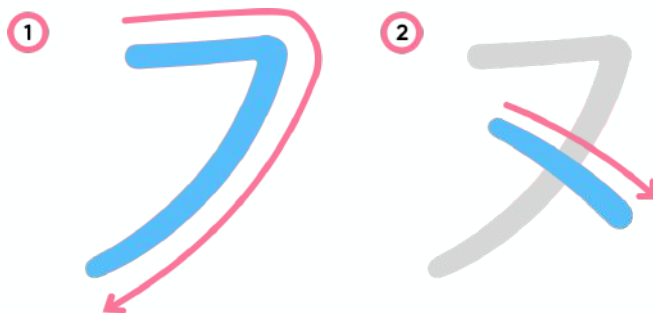
HOW TO PRONOUNCE ヌ

ヌ is the katakana for ぬ (nu).

HOW TO REMEMBER ヌ

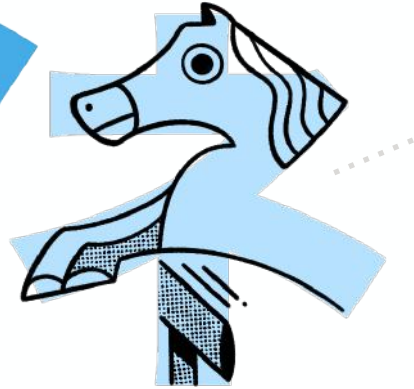
The chopsticks are grabbing some noodles and pulling them out of a bowl.

PRACTICE WRITING ヌ



ヌ	ヌ	ヌ	ヌ
ヌ	ヌ	ヌ	ヌ

ネ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ネ

ネ is the katakana for ね (ne).

HOW TO REMEMBER ネ

Look, this kana looks like a horse (neigh!) jumping over a hurdle. Never gamble, kids!

PRACTICE WRITING ネ

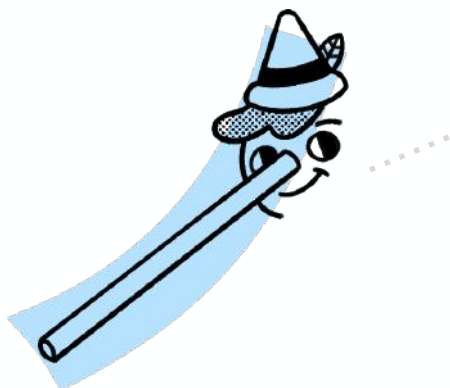


ネ	ネ	ネ	ネ				
ネ	ネ	ネ	ネ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ノ

ノ is the katakana for の (no).

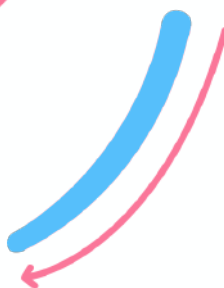


HOW TO REMEMBER ノ

It looks like a really long nose.

PRACTICE WRITING ノ

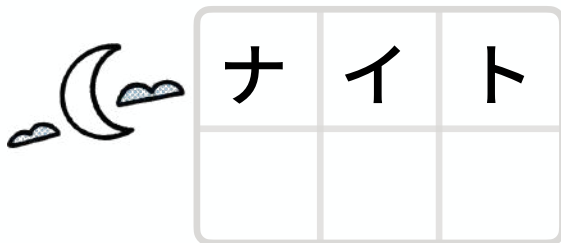
1



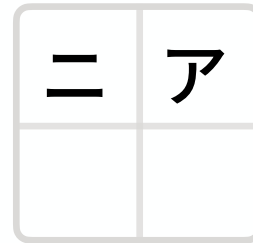
LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

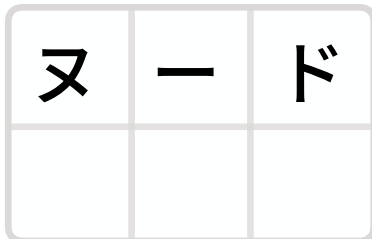
ナ	ニ	ノ	ネ	ヌ	ニ	ノ	ナ	ヌ	ネ



ナイト is night.



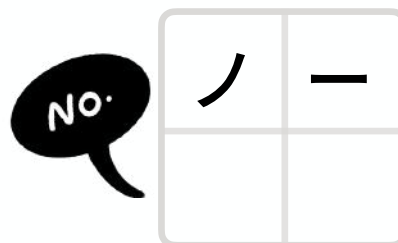
ニア is near.



ヌード is nude.



ネクスト is next.



ノー is "No."



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ハ

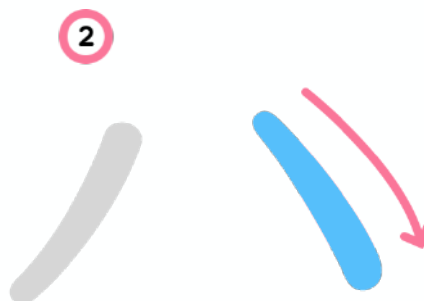
ハ is the katakana for は (ha).

HOW TO REMEMBER ハ

This is shaped like one of those rice paddy hats. You'll have to connect the pieces, but you can see it, right?



PRACTICE WRITING ハ



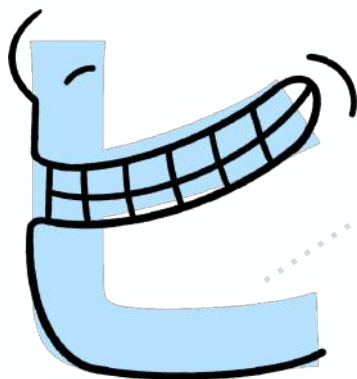
ヒ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ヒ

ヒ is the katakana for ひ (hi).

HOW TO REMEMBER ヒ

He is saying "heehee." Can you see his cheeky grin?

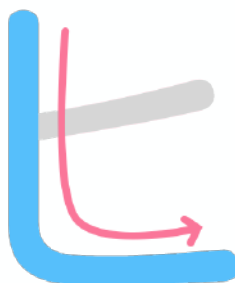


PRACTICE WRITING ヒ

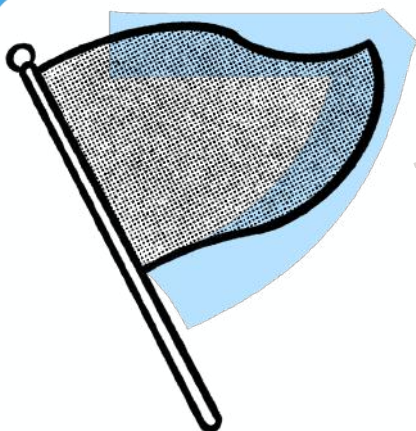
①



②



フ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE フ

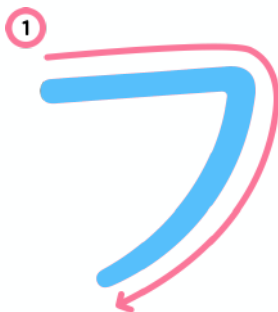
フ is the katakana for ふ (fu).

HOW TO REMEMBER フ

フ looks like a flag that's triangle-shaped. Hooray for the triangle flag!

You'll need to use your imagination to add the stick/flagpole, but you'll know フ is a flag waving in the wind when you see that triangle shape.

PRACTICE WRITING フ

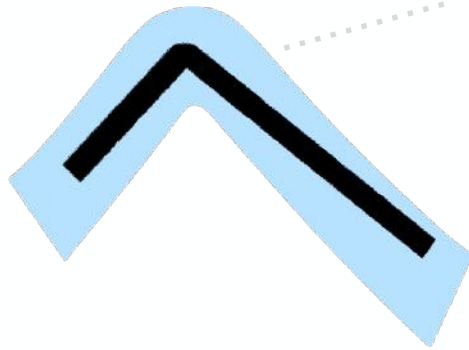


フ	フ	フ	フ				
フ	フ	フ	フ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ^

^ is the katakana for ^ (he).



HOW TO REMEMBER ^

This katakana looks just like the hiragana ^. If you know one, you know them both!

PRACTICE WRITING ^

1



ホ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ホ

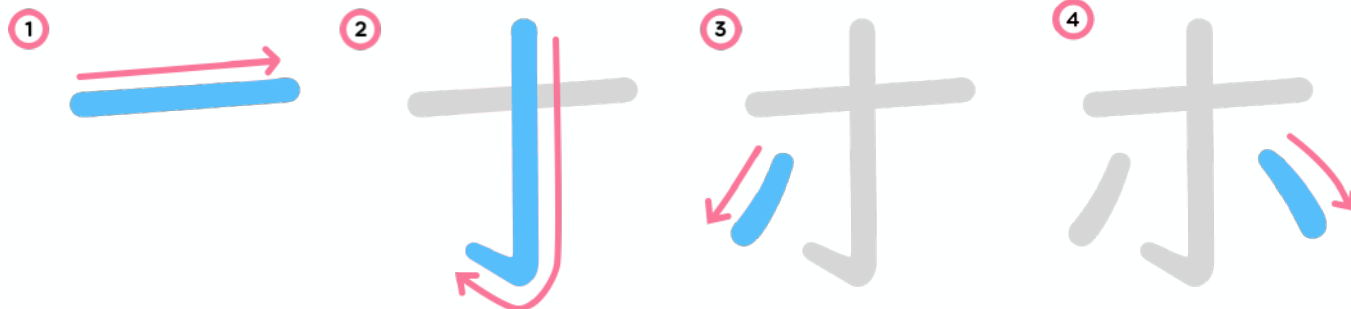
ホ is the katakana for ほ (ho).

HOW TO REMEMBER ホ

This is a holy cross. You can even see holy light coming off of it. So holy.



PRACTICE WRITING ホ



ホ	ホ	ホ	ホ				
ホ	ホ	ホ	ホ				

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

ヘ	フ	ヒ	ホ	ハ	ヒ	ヘ	フ	ホ	ハ



ハ	エ

ハエ means fly in Japanese.



コ	ー	ヒ	ー

コーヒー is coffee.



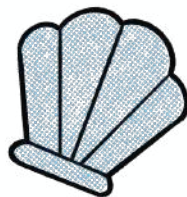
タ	フ

タフ is tough.



ヘ	イ

ヘイ is "hey".



ホ	タ	テ

ホタテ means scallop in Japanese.

LET'S PRACTICE READING KATAKANA FROM T - N - H ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

ナ	ツ	ト	フ	ニ	チ	ホ	ネ	タ	テ

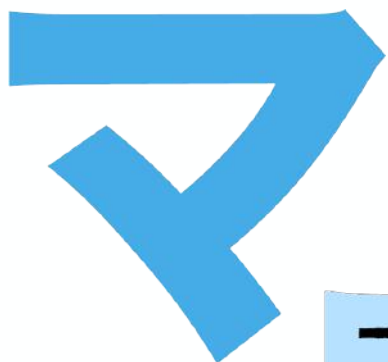
ヌ	ノ	ヒ	ハ	ナ	ホ	チ	テ	ニ	フ

タ	ヌ	テ	ト	ツ	ニ	ヘ	ナ	フ	ネ

ツ	ノ	ナ	ネ	ハ	ニ	ト	ヌ	ホ	ヒ

ヘ	ヒ	チ	ヌ	フ	ナ	ホ	タ	ニ	ネ

ト	ナ	ヒ	フ	ハ	ネ	ツ	ニ	ネ	ノ

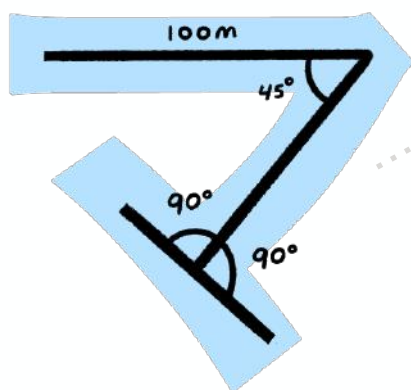


HOW TO PRONOUNCE マ

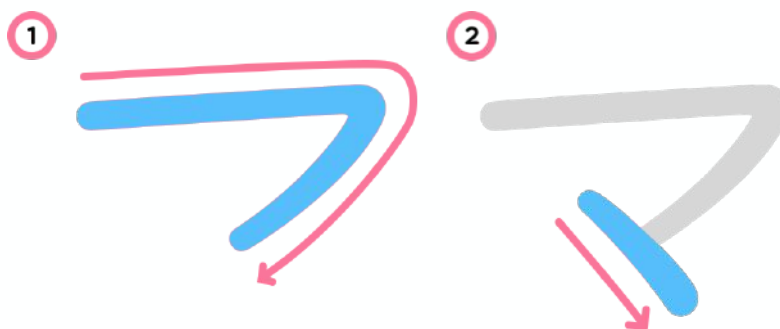
マ is the katakana for ま (ma).

HOW TO REMEMBER マ

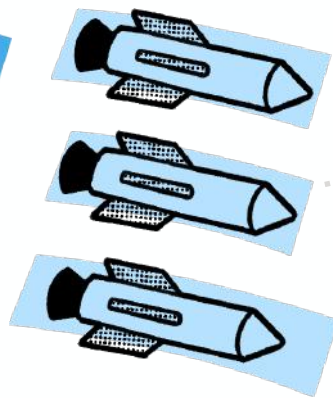
Look at all those angles! Those lengths! Those measurements! All that math!



PRACTICE WRITING マ



マ	マ	マ	マ				
マ	マ	マ	マ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE め

め is the katakana for み (mi).

HOW TO REMEMBER め

Three missiles, flying towards you.
Be careful!

PRACTICE WRITING め

1



2



3



ム

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ム

ム is the katakana for む (mu).



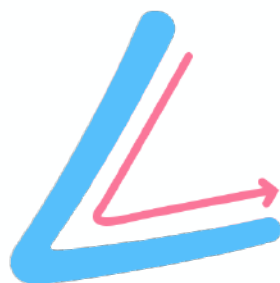
HOW TO REMEMBER ム

It is shaped like a cow's friendly face.

Look at that snout! Moo!

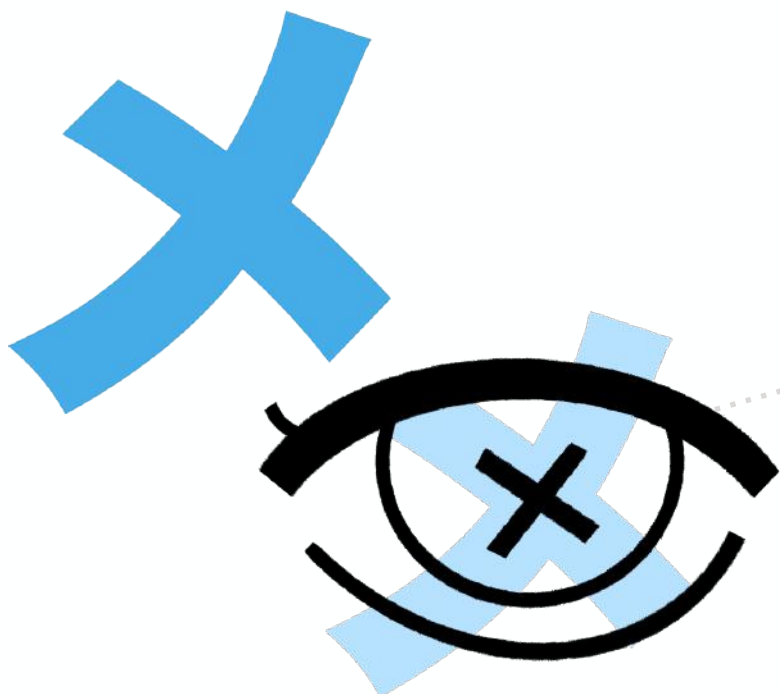
PRACTICE WRITING ム

①



②





HOW TO PRONOUNCE X

X is the katakana for め (me).

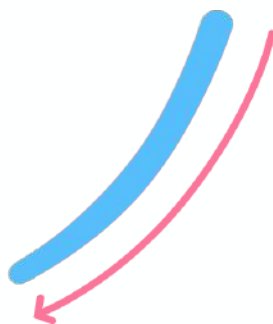
HOW TO REMEMBER X

This looks like an "X" over someone's 目 (め) – "eye" in Japanese.

Meh, I guess they're dead now.

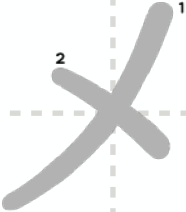
PRACTICE WRITING X

1



2



モ

モ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE モ

モ is the katakana for も (mo).

HOW TO REMEMBER モ

This looks very similar to the hiragana も, so you should be able to make that connection and remember both of these.

PRACTICE WRITING モ



LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

メ	マ	ミ	モ	ム	ミ	メ	ム	モ	マ



マ	ウ	ス

マウス is mouse.



ミ	ミ	ズ

ミミズ means earthworm in Japanese.



ム	ー	ビ	ー

ムービー is movie.

メ	モ



メモ is memo.

モ	イ	ス	ト

モイスト is moist.

ヤ

や

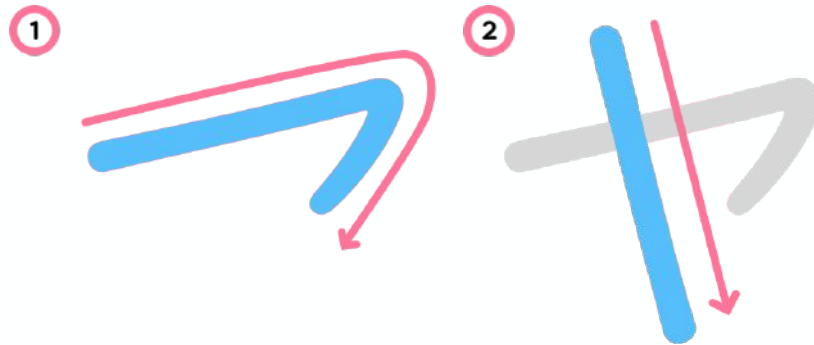
HOW TO PRONOUNCE ヤ

ヤ is the katakana for や (ya).

HOW TO REMEMBER ヤ

This looks just like the hiragana や, minus a little line.

PRACTICE WRITING ヤ



ヤ	ヤ	ヤ	ヤ				
や	や	や	や				

ユ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ュ

ユ is the katakana for ュ (yu).

HOW TO REMEMBER ュ

You have a hook for a hand. What are you, a pirate?

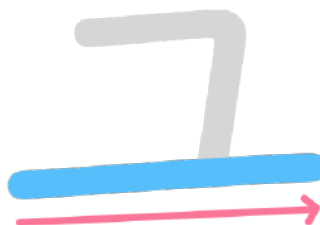


PRACTICE WRITING ュ

①



②



ヨ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ヨ

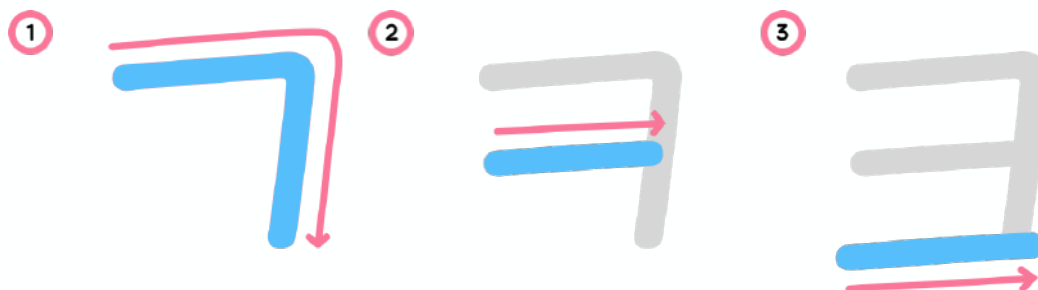
ヨ is the katakana for よ (yo).

HOW TO REMEMBER ヨ

See how this kana looks like someone doing yoga? Only a yogi could bend into such a boxy position.



PRACTICE WRITING ヨ



1 2 3 							

LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

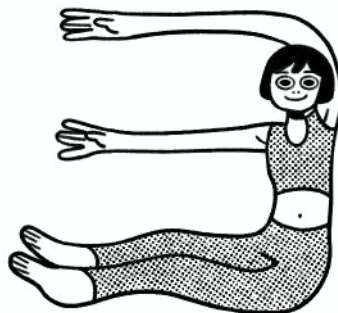
ヨ	ユ	ヤ	ヨ	ヤ	ユ	ヨ	ヤ	ユ	ヤ

ヤ	ク	ザ

ヤクザ is yakuza
(Japanese gangs).

ユ	ニ	ー	ク

ユニーク is unique.



ヨ	ガ

ヨガ is yoga.

ラ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE ラ

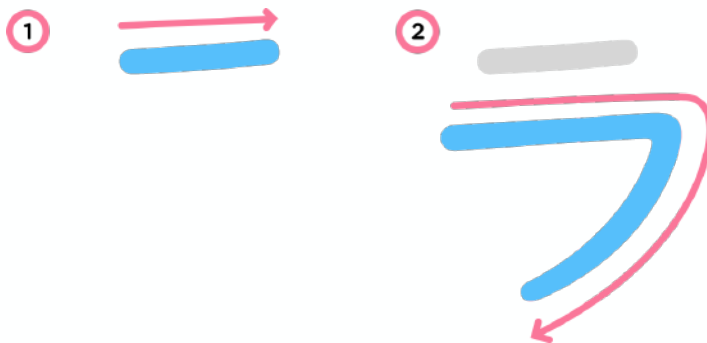
ラ is the katakana for ら (ra).

HOW TO REMEMBER ラ

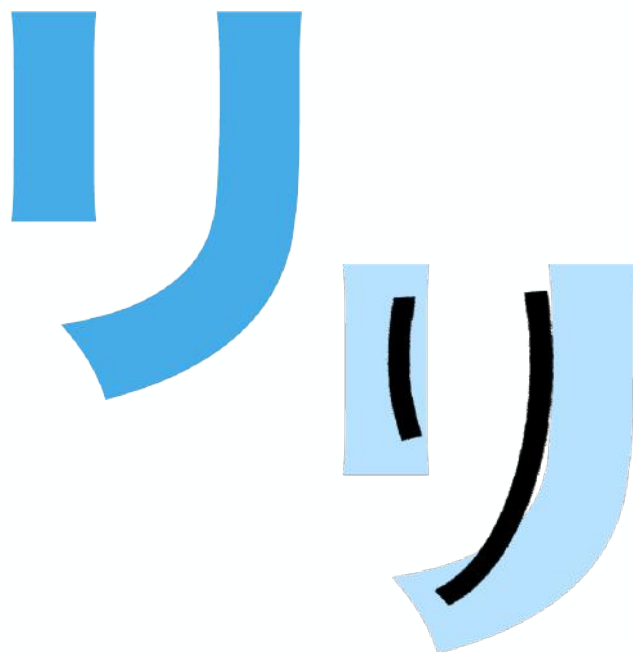
It is a raptor wearing some sweet sunglasses like a rapper.



PRACTICE WRITING ラ



ラ	ラ	ラ	ラ				
ラ	ラ	ラ	ラ				



HOW TO PRONOUNCE リ

リ is the katakana for り (ri).

HOW TO REMEMBER リ

It looks just like the hiragana り, or at least very, very similar.

PRACTICE WRITING リ

①

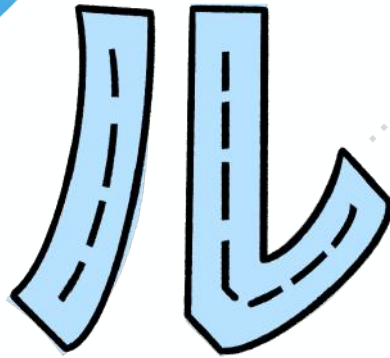


②



ル



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ル

ル is the katakana for る (ru).

HOW TO REMEMBER ル

There are two routes you can take:
Route One and Route Two.

PRACTICE WRITING ル

①



②



ル	ル	ル	ル				
ル	ル	ル	ル				

レ

HOW TO PRONOUNCE レ

レ is the katakana for れ (re).

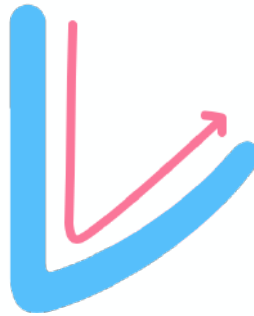
HOW TO REMEMBER レ

Look at that beautiful red hair that Rei has! It's so flowy!



PRACTICE WRITING レ

1



レ	レ	レ	レ				
レ	レ	レ	レ				

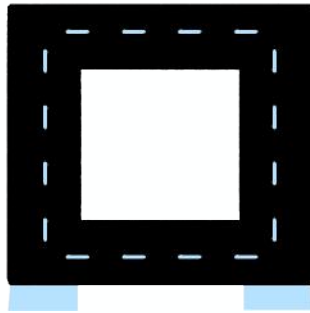


HOW TO PRONOUNCE □

□ is the katakana for 𐰪 (ro).

HOW TO REMEMBER □

This road goes around in a square, never ending. What a terrible road this is. What are you, a twelve-year-old playing Sim City?



PRACTICE WRITING □

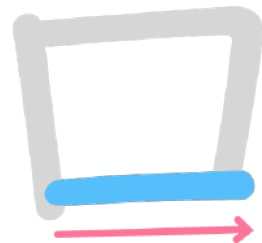
1



2



3



LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

リ	ラ	ロ	ル	レ	リ	ロ	ル	ラ	レ

ラ	ッ	キ	ー

ラッキー is lucky.

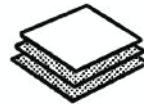
リ	サ	イ	ク	ル

リサイクル is recycle.



ル	ア	ー

ルアー is lure (fake bait).



レ	イ	ヤ	ー

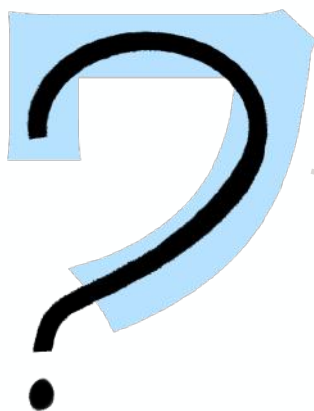
レイヤー is layer.



ロ	イ	ヤ	ル

ロイヤル is royal.

ワ



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ワ

ワ is the katakana for わ (wa).

HOW TO REMEMBER ワ

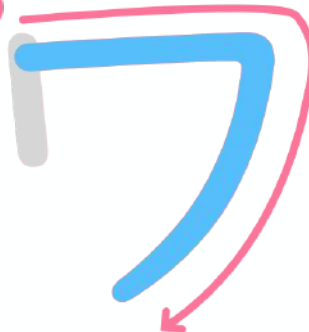
This kana looks like a question mark. When you ask a question, you often begin with the word what. What are you doing? What are you wearing? What are you not wearing?

PRACTICE WRITING ワ

1

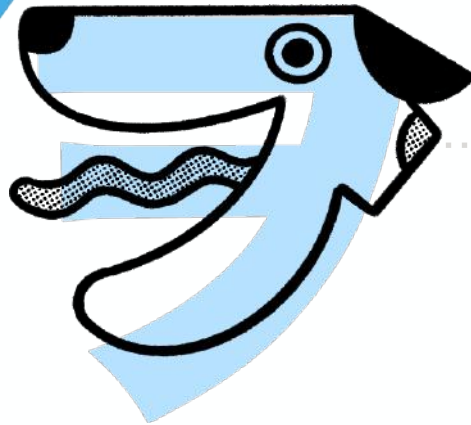


2



ワ	ワ	ワ	ワ				
ワ	ワ	ワ	ワ				

ヲ



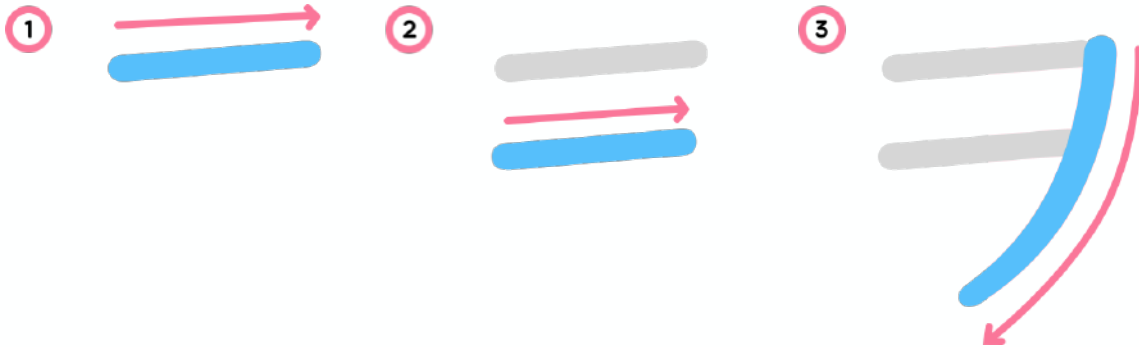
HOW TO PRONOUNCE ヲ

ヲ is the katakana for を (wo). That means, it's pronounced like お (o)!

HOW TO REMEMBER ヲ

To remember ヲ is "wo," think of a dog woofing so hard its tongue is flying out. "Oh!" you exclaim, taken aback by this dog's tongue.

PRACTICE WRITING ヲ



1 2 3			



HOW TO PRONOUNCE ャ

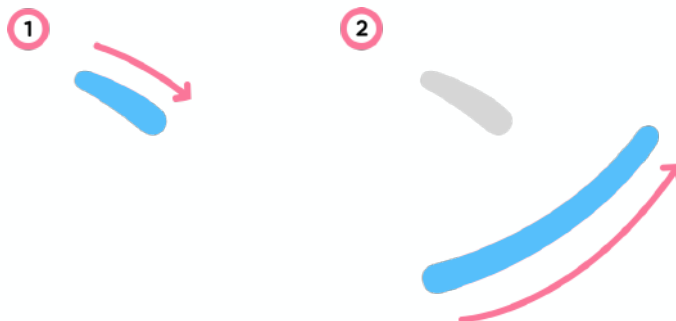
ン is the katakana for ん (n).
Sometimes, when it comes before
certain sounds, it's pronounced like m
too.

HOW TO REMEMBER ャ

Do you remember how シ is a lady
with a weird face? The two little
dashes are more horizontal than
vertical, which helps us to know it's a
face.

So, what about ャ? It's a man who has
only one eye. Mnnnnnnn, but why
only one eye, you ask? Don't ask, I
don't know.

PRACTICE WRITING ャ



LET'S PRACTICE READING!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

ヨ	ン	ワ	ン	ワ	ヨ	ン	ン	ワ	ヨ

ワ	イ	ン



ワイン is wine.



サ	ン	シャ	イ	ン



サンシャイン is sunshine.

ワ	ン	タ	ン

ワンタン is wonton
(a Chinese dumpling).

LET'S PRACTICE READING KATAKANA FROM M - Y - R - W ROWS!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

リ	ミ	ル	ロ	ユ	ル	ヲ	ヨ	ヤ	マ
ン	レ	ヤ	ル	ム	ユ	リ	ワ	ル	レ
ヨ	ル	ン	ヤ	メ	レ	ン	ユ	リ	モ
ラ	ロ	メ	レ	ヤ	ン	ワ	ル	ミ	ユ
ル	リ	ラ	マ	モ	レ	ロ	ン	ヤ	モ
レ	ム	ユ	リ	ン	メ	ヨ	ロ	リ	ラ

LEARN VARIATION KATAKANA

Congratulations! You've learned all the basic katakana. Now it's time for you to learn about "variation" katakana.

DAKUTEN & HAN-DAKUTEN

Remember how we can change kana pronunciation with dakuten (this double quotation mark-looking symbol: `) and han-dakuten (this little circle: °)? They work with katakana too.

	K → G		S → Z		T → D		H → B		P
ア A	カ KA	ガ GA	サ SA	ザ ZA	タ TA	ダ DA	ハ HA	バ BA	パ PA
イ I	キ KI	ギ GI	シ SHI	ジ JI	チ CHI	ヂ JI (DI)	ヒ HI	ビ BI	ピ PI
ウ U	ク KU	グ GU	ス SU	ズ ZU	ツ TSU	ヅ ZU (DU)	フ FU	ブ BU	プ PU
エ E	ケ KE	ゲ GE	セ SE	ゼ ZE	テ TE	デ DE	ヘ HE	ベ BE	ペ PE
オ O	コ KO	ゴ GO	ソ SO	ゾ ZO	ト TO	ド DO	ホ HO	ボ BO	ポ PO

What's unique about dakuten katakana is that you can dakuten ウ, turning it into ヴ. ヴ represents the "vu" sound, and is used for transcribing v-sounds (we'll talk more

about this later in the combination katakana section).

ウ U	→	ヴ BU (VU)
--------	---	--------------

You can technically dakuten う in hiragana too (which would be っ), but doing so in katakana is much more common. That's because

v-sounds aren't traditionally used in Japanese, so you see this in katakana a lot more. Be aware that although ヴ is the character for "vu," it actually sounds more like "bu" (ブ) because a lot of Japanese speakers are not used to pronouncing v-sounds.

COMBINATION KATAKANA

Now, do you remember the two components you use for combination kana? These work the same way with katakana as they do with hiragana.

1) Kana from the イ (I) row.

2) The small ヤ - ュ - ヨ.

However, combinations don't stop here with katakana. There are a lot more combinations in katakana that we can use to represent sounds not traditionally available in Japanese. Some combinations are less common than the others, but another set you can combine is:

1) Kana from the ウ (U) row — especially ヲ, ウ, フ, and ツ.

2) The small ア - イ - ウ - エ - オ.

	ヴ	ウ	フ	ツ
ア	ヴァ BWA (VA)		ファ FA	ツァ TZA (TSA)
イ	ヴィ BWI (VI)	ウィ WI	フィ FI	ツイ TZI (TSI)
ウ	ヴ BU (VU)	ウ U	フ FU	ツ TSU
エ	ヴェ BWE (VE)	ウェ WE	フェ FE	ツェ TZE (TSE)
オ	ヴォ BWO (VO)	ウオ WO (UXO)	フォ FO	ツォ TZO (TSO)

Combination katakana that use ヲ (ヴァ - ヴィ - ヴェ - ヴォ) are pronounced more like b-sounds or bw-sounds, though they are often used to represent v-sounds such as ヲイオリン (violin) and ヲジュアル (visual).

ウ-sounds are sort of making up for the missing w-sounds (since the w-column only has フ and ヲ), and are used for words like ウィンドウ (window) and ウェンズデー (Wednesday). To type ウォ, type ウ ("U") and the small オ ("XO") separately.

フ-sounds are pretty straightforward — they are used for f-sounds to represent words like ファン (fan) and フィッシュ (fish).

ツ-sounds are less common, but are used for tz/ts sounds. They often appear when transliterating Italian "z" sounds like モツツアレラ (Mozzarella) as well as Chinese "ts" or "tz" sounds. Note that you use "ts" on the keyboard when typing those ツ-sounds.

In addition to the combination sets that we've talked about so far, there are a few more scattered sounds you can make with combination katakana using the small vowels.

Here's the rest of the common ones.

ティ TI (THI)	party
ディ DI (DHI)	candy
トゥ TWU	<u>two</u>
ドウ DWU	<u>do</u>

シェ SHE	<u>shell</u>
ジェ JE	<u>jelly</u>
チェ CHE	<u>check</u>

Are you getting the gist of it? Don't worry if you are still taking it all in.

The most important thing right now is to be able to read these extra combinations and know they exist. You'll see some of these pretty often, which means that through experience they will feel more natural to you. It's just one of those things you have to use and experience to become comfortable with it.

LONG VOWELS (ー)

You've already seen this dash earlier in the reading exercises. Unlike hiragana, which deals with long vowels by repeating the vowel, katakana has a special vowel extender character, a dash. When you see this, you'll just need to extend the vowel that it comes after.

For example, "cheese" is pronounced like "chiizu." To represent that in katakana, you write チーズ. If this didn't have the dash and looked like チズ, it'd be pronounced "chizu" and mean "map" in Japanese, instead of delicious "cheese."

You'll see this dash a lot in katakana. It can be challenging at first to guess how to spell words with it, but with a lot of experience, you'll start to understand when and how to use it. For now, just focus on reading it correctly. That part is much easier, and that is the part that will give you the experience you need to reproduce it later on.

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE KATAKANA!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

ボクシング

チャンピオン

トリオ

タイ

カード

リスニング

メッセンジャー

イン

アクセサリー

オレンジ

カード

ルック

クラシック

コミュニケーション

アイディア

プラスティック

レストラン

フィードバック

ハイブリッド

センチメンタル

レギュラー

LET'S PRACTICE READING ALL THE KATAKANA!

What's the reading? Write in romaji.

ヴォーグ

フィレンツェ

フォーム

ポパイ

トゥモロー

ウェイター

ディスコ

アット

ティーンズ

アップル

ホラー

スプーン

センター

ジャーナリスト

ロマネスコ

チェーン

リアクション

ルーティーン

コンピューター

オートマティック

ラッキー

WHAT'S NEXT?

Here are some recommendations for what you can do to keep moving forward with your Japanese proficiency.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE

Tofugu's online kana quiz tool <https://kana-quiz.tofugu.com> will be handy for additional katakana practice too! Just like you (hopefully) did for your hiragana learning, try spacing out your practice. That will help you retain the knowledge in the long term. If you feel like you can use some more hiragana help, mixing in some hiragana reviews during your katakana practice is a good idea too. That will help you solidify both your hiragana and katakana knowledge!

LEARN KANJI (& JAPANESE VOCABULARY)

Tofugu has an online platform for learning kanji (characters of Chinese origin) and Japanese vocabulary called WaniKani (wanikani.com). Now you've gone through all the katakana, it would be a good time to start studying kanji.

Kanji can be intimidating, because they're complicated and unfamiliar to a lot of learners. But WaniKani makes it easy by breaking them down into parts and giving you memory hints (a.k.a. mnemonics) to help you associate their shapes with their meanings and readings.

WaniKani also uses SRS (Spaced Repetition System) for its flashcard feature. It automatically spaces out your practice so that everything you learn sticks better to your brain. You can learn about 2,000 kanji and more than 6,000 words using WaniKani. If you're fast, you can do that in a little over a year! Try the first three levels for free and see if it works for you.

...This is the end of Tofugu's Learn Katakana Book. We hope to see you around on your Japanese learning journey!