How to Use this Guide

It is often easy to sit back and let guides like this teach you.

But that is not the most effective way to learn.

The most effective way to learn anything is to take an active role.

So, make sure you are not a passive student who simply reads through the guide.

Get involved and make sure that you practice the characters as you progress.

Make sure that you listen to the audio for the sounds each character makes.

Make the sounds yourself as you practice writing them.

Once you’ve finished the guide, be sure to revise using our recommended Spaced Repetition Systems. And continue to hone your reading and writing skills with our recommendations.

And, most importantly, have fun.

- がんばってね！Good Luck!
We can start with these katakana because if you already know hiragana, you will be able to learn these very quickly and easily. They look very similar to their hiragana counterparts. So, my suggestion is to write them out next to their hiragana version, while making the sound for each one out loud. I have shown the similarities by highlighting in orange how we can get to the katakana character from the hiragana character.

Okay, just like when we learned hiragana, we are going to start with the character ノ which makes the sound ‘no’.
As you can see, you start off your stroke the same way that you would if you were writing the hiragana の except you stop before you create a circle-like character.

We are just creating a slash. To remember the hiragana character, we associated ‘no’ and の with a stop sign because that is what it looks like.

We can do the same with the katakana ノ because we often put a diagonal line through things to signal ‘no’, ‘not allowed’, ‘no entry’, etc.

This is freaky because we are progressing in the same order as we did in the hiragana guide. This is just a coincidence but it is helpful!

We are going to learn メ which makes the sound ‘me’ as in meadow.

You can see how we progressed from ノ to メ by adding just another slash.

This kind of looks like a cross that is leaning on its side or an elongated ‘x’.
If you know the classic manga *Rurouni Kenshin*, you will know that the main character, Kenshin, has a scar underneath his eye, or his ‘me’, that is shaped just like this katakana!

The next katakana is ヌ which makes the sound ‘nu’ as in *new*.

This katakana looks similar to ネ except that this time we are going to put a little roof or a lid on the top. You can see I have highlighted this area in orange.

If you want a way to remember this katakana, I think it kind of looks like somebody running. The bottom part of the character looks like two legs. So, just imagine someone who is nude running. Where is he running to? Maybe he is running nude to the noodle shop.

Now we have enough katakana to introduce our first word.
Remember that katakana is used to write words that come from other languages, particularly English, so you should have no problem recognizing and remembering the word!

Our word is:
カヌー kanuu – canoe

Our next katakana is イ and makes the sound ‘i’ as in easy.

We get this character by progressing from ノ. As you can see, the top of the character is the same diagonal stroke that we have for ノ but now we are going to add another vertical stroke extending from the middle underneath it.

This character kind of looks like someone has tried to write the roman alphabet’s version of ‘i’ but has slipped when they went to put a dot over it. Just imagine someone pushed their arm as they were writing it, making them screw up, and shout ‘iii’.
This katakana is ハ which has the sound of ‘ha’ as in heart.

We can progress ノ to get to ハ.

Lots of katakana incorporate the stroke for ノ.

This one should be pretty easy to remember without a mnemonic device but if you need one just remember: ノ is half of ハ.

Quick note: Japanese has the word ハーフ or ‘haafu’ which comes from ‘half’ and refers to people who are mixed race; e.g. someone who has a white dad and a Japanese mum. Japanese people are incredibly curious about people who are ‘haafu’.

ハイ hai – high – this is a slang word like in ハイテンション ‘high tension’, which means ‘I’m on a high’ or ‘I’m excited’

ニーハイ niihai – this is the word for ‘knee-high socks’, which Japanese people find extremely cute
The next katakana is ホ which makes the sound ‘ho’ as in hot.

For this one, we just need to put a holy cross right in the middle of ハ.

Our next one is オ which makes the sound ‘o’ as in only.
We get this one from ぼ. All we have to do is add a flick going to the left from the bottom of the cross, add a diagonal sloping line on the left, and get rid of the ハ part.

It kind of looks like someone is about to fall over and is shouting ‘ooo!’ Or someone who is about to do a cartwheel and an audience of onlookers are shouting ‘ooo!’

This katakana is オ and makes the sound ‘to’.

If we progress from オ, we just have to get rid of the flick at the bottom, the horizontal stroke at the top, and move the diagonal stroke on the left to the right side.

The character looks like a totally weird ‘t’.
Here are our new words:

コート kooto – coat
ノート nooto – note

Next up we have ナ which makes the sound ‘na’.

We can get this character by moving from ノ. All we have to do is add a horizontal line.

Try not to get ナ confused with メ. They are both bent crosses but ナ is closer to a natural cross shape.

ナ also shares similarities with its hiragana sibling な.

Also, なな or ‘nana’ means ‘seven’ and the katakana ナ kind of looks like a seven.
This one is チ and has the sound ‘chi’ as in *chicken*.

We just need to add a sloping horizontal stroke to the top of ナ to get チ.

Imagine that this character is a *chief*, wearing a big hat.

The next katakana is サ and has the sound of ‘sa’ as in *salsa*. 
We can get this one from ナ. All you have to do is add an extra smaller vertical line to the left.

With a small stretch of the imagination, the character looks like two people, arm in arm, *salsa* dancing.

This character is ケ and makes the sound ‘ke’ as in *kettle*.

We get this character by moving from サ. We just have to bring the smaller vertical line on the left further out, perched on the edge of the character, and slant it a little.

This character looks like a really weird ‘k’.
This next one is ク and makes the sound ‘ku’ as in *cook*.

It comes from ノ. You just need to add that little extra rectangular top to the character.

From ク we are going to move to タ which makes the sound ‘ta’ as in *tart*.

For this character, we will add a line in the middle of the character for ク.
New words:
クタクタ kutakuta – ‘burned out’ or ‘exhausted’ – an onomatopoeic slang word
ケータイ keetai – cellphone – this comes from the Japanese word for ‘carryable’
セーター seetaa – sweater
タバコ tabako – tabacco

This katakana is once again from ノ. It is フ which makes the sound ‘fu’ as in futon.

This character almost looks like the edge of a toilet bowl. Oh, yuck! What is that? The toilet full.
New words:
フォーク fook – fork
ナイフ naifu – knife

This katakana is ワ and makes the sound ‘wa’ as in what.

We just have to add a tiny little vertical stroke on the left of the character フ to get to ワ.

New words:
ワクワク wakuwaku – ‘excited’; a slang word
タワー tawaa – ‘tower’
This katakana is ウ which makes the sound ‘u’ as in put.

You just need to add a little stick in the middle at the top of the character for ワ and you’ve got ウ.

Just imagine that the little thing at the top is the handle of a plunger sticking out of the toilet. Someone clogged it up by doing a huge うんち or ‘poop’.
This katakana is ス and makes the sound ‘su’ as in *sushi*.

We get to this character from フ. You just need to add another stroke on the right.

This character, like ヌ, looks like someone running. Try not to get it confused with ヌ.
The stroke on the right for this character does not cross over the central stroke at all.
The guy we can see in this character has a shorter leg than the guy we can see in ヌ, so he has to run *super* fast to catch up.

New words:

**スーパー** suupa – ‘supermarket’

**バス** basu – ‘bus’

**チーズ** chiizu – ‘cheese’ – Japanese people say チーズ when they pose for a photo; the person taking the photo will say はいチーズ ‘hai chiizu’, which basically means ‘say cheese!’
Next we have ネ which makes the sound ‘ne’ as in net.

This character looks a bit like a christmas tree. You know the thing about christmas trees is that they never lose their pines.

This katakana is マ which makes the sound ‘ma’ as in marble.
We can move to マ from フ.

This one may prove difficult to remember so make sure to practice this one a lot.

New word:
ママ mama – ‘mommy’ – Japanese children use this
マウス mausu – mouse (computer); the animal mouse is ネズミ

This katakana is ア and it makes the sound ‘a’ as in father.

We just need to stretch the lower part of マ downwards.
New words:
アパート apaato – (usually 2-floored and cheap) apartment
アドバイス adobaisu – advice

This next one is ラ which is pronounced ‘ra’ as in ramen.

It comes from フ. All you have to do is add another horizontal stroke on top of that character.

This character kind of looks like a ramen cup with its lid floating above it in midair as if by magic!

New words:
クーラー kuuraa – A.C. – comes from ‘cooler’
ドラマ dorama – ‘drama’ – Japanese people call every TV show a ドラマ
This katakana is ヲ and makes the sound ‘wo’.

This is not really a useful one because there aren’t that many instances of when you will see this/need this. So, don’t stress too much about remembering it.

This one is ヨ and makes the sound ‘yo’.

It looks like a backwards ‘E’ or kind of like a 3.
New word:
チヨコ choko – chocolate

This one is コ and makes the sound ‘ko’.

It kind of looks like what would happen if you added an extra stroke to the right of the hiragana こ and made it look more straight and less katakana-like.
This character is □ and makes the sound ‘ro’.

We are going to round off the edge of □ in order to get a square box.

This next katakana is エ and makes the sound ‘e’ as in elephant.

This character kind of looks like a set of elevator doors.
New words:
エレベーター erebeetaa – lift (elevator)
エコ eko – ecologically/environmentally friendly

This katakana is に and makes the sound ‘ni’.

This is the same as the kanji for に which means two. And there are two lines. Easy Peasy Japanesy.

New word:
ニュース nyuusu – ‘news’
This next one is テ which has the sound ‘te’.

If you checked out our hiragana guide, you will remember that we said you can remember テ by looking at the lines in the palm of your right hand. Well, to remember テ you can look at the lines in the palm of your left hand.

This katakana is easy to get to from ニ. It is ミ and has the sound ‘mi’ as in meat.
This is similar to the kanji for ‘san’ 三 which means ‘three’. And there are three lines. Just remember to slant them diagonally a bit.

New word:

グミ gumi – ‘gummy’ as in a ‘gummy candy’

This one is も which makes the sound ‘mo’.

It is very similar to the hiragana version も.

You can get to this by one of two ways. Either by sticking a crooked walking stick through も or bending the bottom stroke for も.
New word:
メモ memo – ‘memo’

This character is ヒ which has the sound ‘hi’.

You can get to this one from モ by getting rid of the top stroke and dragging the middle one all the way through.

New words:
ビル biru – (high)building
ビール biiru – beer
サービス saabisu – service – in Japan, ‘saabisu’ means something free so if a waiter says that a drink or some food is ‘saabisu’ that means it’s complimentary
This one is \( \mu \) which has the sound ‘mu’ as in mood.

It looks like the muscle of an arm, pumping some iron. Or it could look like a big nose that is about to drip some mucus.

New word:

ゲー \( \mu \) geemu – ‘game’

This katakana is ‘セ’ and makes the sound ‘se’.
This one looks similar to the hiragana version せ except that it has two strokes instead of three.

Next up we have ヤ which makes the sound ‘ya’.

This one also looks a lot like its hiragana counterpart や.
This one is 力 with the sound ‘ka’.

Another one that looks like the hiragana version か. The only difference is that this does not have the third stroke floating next to the largest part of the character.

This one is レ and makes the sound ‘re’.

This looks like it comes from ノ. You just need to add a horizontal stroke.
New words:
トイレ toire – ‘toilet’
カレー karee – ‘curry’
テレビ terebi – ‘television’

This character is ル with the sound of ‘ru’.
It comes from レ. You just need to add a second vertical slanting line to the left.

New words:
ルール ruuru – rule
ヨーグルト yooguruto – yogurt
メール meeru – mail
ホテル hotteru – hotel
セール seeru – sale – like when there is a discount

This is ริ which makes the sound ‘ri’.

As you can see, it looks a lot like the hiragana ริ.

This katakana is น with the sound ‘n’.
This is where things start to get tricky. We are just going to introduce each of the similar katakana briefly and then we will give you a handy way to remember them all.

New words:
スプーン supuun – spoon
ボタン botan – button
ズボン zubon – trousers – this is from the French ‘jupon’

This is シ and it has the sound of ‘shi’ as in she.

New words:
タクシー takushii – taxi
レシピ reshipi – recept
This is ソ and it has the sound of ‘so’ as in soap.

New word:
ソファ sofa – ‘sofa’

This katakana is ツ and has the sound of ‘tsu’ as in tsunami.
New words:

スーツ suutsu – suits
スポーツ supootsu – sports
ロック rokku – rock – this is the type of music, like ‘rock and roll’
ベッド beddo – bed
インターネット – intaanetto internet (we usually call it ネット netto)
Here comes bloody ソー、シィツツ。

ソーン shi tsu

ソーン shi tsu

There are even words like シーツツ (seesaw) and シーツツ (bed sheet)...

ソーン shi tsu

ソーン shi tsu

ソーン shi tsu

ソーン shi tsu

They are more similar to each other, so just learn either ソー or シィツツ
and シィツツ or シィツツ.
And then you can get シィツツ from ソー
and シィツツ from シィツツ by just adding another small line.

Also, following the stroke is important-ish.
Write ソー “so” and シィツツ “tsu” from the top
and write シィツツ “n” and シィツツ “shi” from the bottom.

Tsu dog

Shi dog

His owner said “Shhh!”
Now he’s sad :(.

ソーン shi tsu

So sweet! :)

Japanese Animals
If you need to know more about the ‘small tsu’, check out these articles on Japanese Ammo:

1. What are these things “゛゜ー” doing?!
   http://www.japaneseammo.com/what-are-these-things-゛゜ー-doing/

2. Why are these “ゃゅょっ” so small?!
   http://www.japaneseammo.com/why-are-these-ゃゅょっ-so-small/

Most common Katakana words you should learn:

スプーン supuun spoon  フォーク fook fork  ナイフ naifu knife  コップ koppu cup  レシピ reshipi recept  メニュー menyuu menu  チーズ chiizu cheese  クリーム kuriim cream  パター bataa butter  パン pan bread (Portuguese)  カレー karee curry  ハンバーガー hanbaagaa hamburger  ピザ piza pizza  ジュース juusu juice  ビール biiru beer  ケーキ keeki cake  チョコ choko chocolate  ダイエット daietto diet  スタイル sutairu figure (doesn’t really mean "style")  ボタン botan button  コート kooto coat  スーツ suutsu suits  スカート sukaato skirts  ズボン zubon trouser  パンツ pantsu pants (underwear)  Tシャツ tii shatsu T-shirts  セーター seetaa sweater  ハイヒール haihiiru high-heel  ピアス piasu pierce  メイク meiku make-up  パソコン pasokon personal computer  ニュース nyusu news  テレビ terebi television  ドラマ dorama drama  インターネット intaanetto (internet)  スポーツ supootsu sports  ケータイ keetai cellphone  スマホ sumafo smart-phone  カメラ kamera camera  ノート nooto note  ペン pen  ピアノ piano  ギター gitaa guitar  ホテル hoteru hotel  マンション manshon condo-apartment (bigger and more expensive one than アパート apaato)  アパート apaato apartment  ビル biru building  トイレ toire toilet  シャワー shawaa shower  シャンプー shampuu shampoo  ドア doa door  ベッド beddo bed  ソファ sofa  エレベーター erebeetaa elevator  バス basu bus  タクシー takushii taxi  クラス kurasu classroom
Country names in katakana:
アメリカ amerika america イギリス igirisu England カナダ kanada Canada オーストラリア oosutoraria Australia ニュージーランド nyuujiirando New Zeeland

Cannot list all countries, so I will list the countries I've visited :
ロシア roshia Russia ドイツ doitsu Germany ポーランド poorando Poland デンマーク denmaaku Denmark フランス furansu France イタリア itaria Italy チェコ cheko Czech Republic タイ tai Thailand ベトナム betonamu Vietnam フィリピン firipin Philippine

Most countries sound the same as in English, for example, France - フランス furansu, オーストラリア oosutoraria, カナダ kanada, ロシア roshia, オーストラリア oosutoraria, カナダ kanada, ロシア roshia, and so on.

However, there are a few countries that sound different from English. For example, Germany - ドイツ doitsu and the UK - イギリス igirisu. Japan and Germany had a good relationship during the war, so we didn’t call Germany jaamanii or something but Doitsu like “Deutschland” in German. But what about the UK? Why not Ingurando or something? The answer is that Japan had a good relationship with Portugal as well, and we have some words borrowed from Portugese as well. Like Bread - パン pan. And the portugeese word for “English” is “inglez”. And “igirisu” was what a Japanese person heard from the word “inglez” back then… as you probably know, Japanese people are bad at learning languages or catching foreign words because we have a lot less sounds.

Also China and Korea are not written in Katakana, because they use chinese characters as well. China – 中国 chuugoku, South Korea – 韓国 kankoku, North Korea – 北朝鮮 kitachousen. Eww... kanji looks scary D: Well, if you think so, don’t even bother to learn those kanji yet. You can just write in hiragana :)
Write your own name in Katakana :) I listed most common names.

ジャック jakku Jack ハリー harii Harry トム tomu Tom ヘンリー henrii Henry
ジョン jon John クリス kurisu Chris
ウィル wiru Will デイビッド deibiddo David
エマ ema Emma アリス arisu Alice ジェーン jeen Jane エミー emii Emmy エリー erii Ellie アンナ anna Anna
ルーシー ruushii Lucy ケイティー keitii Katy

Phew!

Congratulations on making it through.

Now, just make sure you have practiced writing each character a few times and listen to the pronunciation. We have included a chart of the katakana at the end of this guide.

We have a video that will help you with the sounds on the Japanese Ammo YouTube channel.

As for revision, you will find using a Spaced Repetition System, or SRS, will be the most efficient. This will cut your revision time down to the bare minimum and make sure that you retain everything with ease.

A great SRS is Anki. You can download it and input your own information or load pre-made flashcards into it.

Another great option is on a website called Memrise.

You won’t need to revise katakana for too long. You only really need to do enough to recognize signs and write your name.

Once you have learned how to write hiragana and katakana the real war is about to begin: KANJI!!!
Just kidding. It won’t be too bad. We’ll make sure to help you out when you get there. We will have a kanji guide coming out in the near future.

Good luck! がんばってね！

Thank you for reading.

We hope you enjoyed this guide and found it useful!

Best wishes,
The Japanese Ammo Team
| ノホケスョテセン | メオクマコギャン SO | イナフラレモツ HIRU | ハチワネトユニリ
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------
| ヘサワニムリ    | ヌトタアエミカソ   | アフフウ          | ヒチサウデモ |

Japanese Ammo