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# Japanese Hiragana

## Origin

Hiragana syllables developed from Chinese characters, as shown below. Hiragana were originally called *onnade* or 'women's hand' as were used mainly by women - men wrote in kanji and katakana. By the 10th century, hiragana were used by everybody. The word hiragana means "oridinary syllabic script".

In early versions of hiragana there were often many different characters to represent the same syllable, however the system was eventually simplified so that there was a one-to-one relationship between spoken and written syllables. The present orthography of hiragana was codified by the Japanese government in 1946.



# The hiragana syllabary

〒ノロターノオレミ よくよい しょうしょう

In each column the romaji appears on the left, the hiragana symbols in the middle and the kanji from which they developed on the right. There is some dispute about which kanji the hiragana developed from.

半1	反名	(ひ	51	がな	) hii	ragar	na							
а	あ	安	i	い	以	u	う	宇	e	え	衣	0	お	於
ka	か	加	ki	き	幾	ku	<	久	ke	け	計	ko	٦	5
sa	さ	左	shi	し	Ż	su	す	寸	se	せ	世	so	そ	曽
ta	た	太	chi	ち	知	tsu	つ	Л	te	τ	天	to	٢	止
na	な	奈	ni	に	仁	nu	ぬ	奴	ne	ね	袮	no	σ	乃
ha	は	波	hi	ひ	比	fu	ふ	不	he	$\sim$	部	ho	ほ	保
ma	ま	末	mi	み	美	mu	む	武	me	め	女	mo	も	毛
ya	や	也				yu	ゆ	由				yo	ደ	与
ra	6	良	ri	IJ	利	ru	る	留	re	れ	礼	ro	ろ	呂
wa	わ	和	wi	ゐ	為				we	ゑ	恵	wo	を	遠
												n	ю	无

The symbols for 'wi' and 'we' were made obsolete by the Japanese Minsitry of Education in 1946 as part of its language reforms. The symbols 'ha', 'he' and 'wo' are pronounced 'wa', 'e' and 'o' respecitvely when used as grammatical particles.

Additional sounds are represented using diacritics or combinations of syllables:

ga 🏌	<b>)ኝ</b> gi	ぎ	gu	<``	ge	げ	go	ご	kya	きゃ	kyu 👸	きゅ	kyo きよ
za 🕇	<u>ن</u> ۲	じ	zu	ず	ze	ぜ	zo	ぞ	gya	ぎゃ	gyu 🖁	ぎゅ	gyo ぎょ
da 🏌	ビji	ぢ	zu	づ	de	で	do	ど	sha	しゃ	shu	しゅ	<sup>sho</sup> しょ
ba <b>[</b> ;	ť bi	び	bu	ぶ	be	べ	bo	ぼ	ja	じゃ	ju	じゅ	ゅ じょ
pa <b>(</b> ;	ぱ pi	ぴ	pu	ぷ	pe	ペ	ро	ぽ	cha	ちゃ	chu 7	ちゅ	<sup>cho</sup> ちょ
									nya	にゃ	nyu 🛛	こゆ	nyo にょ
									hya	ひゃ	hyu 7	ひゅ	hyo ひょ
									bya	びゃ	byu 🕻	びゅ	byo びょ
									руа	ぴゃ	pyu 7	ぴゅ	pyo ぴょ
									mya	みゃ	myu 🌡	みゅ	myo みよ
									rya	りゃ	ryu l	りゅ	ryo りょ

#### Characteristics and usage of hiragana

The hiragana syllabary consists of 48 syllables and is mainly used to write word endings, known as *okurigana* in Japanese. Hiragana are also widely used in materials for children, textbooks, animation and comic books, to write Japanese words which are not normally written with kanji, such as adverbs and some nouns and adjectives, or for words whose kanji are obscure or obselete.

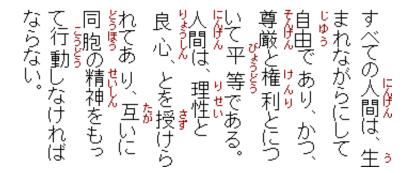
Hiragana are also sometimes written above or along side kanji to indicate pronunciation, especially if the pronunication is obscure or non-standard. Hiragana used in this way are known as *furigana* or ruby. In horizontal texts, the furigana appear above the kanji and in vertical texts, the furigana appear on the right of the kanji. In newspapers it is a legal requirement for furigana to be attached to kanji which are not included in the official list of the 1,945 most frequently-used kanji. Newspapers in fact rarely use kanji not included in this list.

## **Furigana in action**

The furigana in the following text are the small red symbols.

Horizontal text にんげん じゆう そんげん けんり べての人間は、 牛まれながらにして自由であり、かつ、尊厳と権 こつい にんげん りせい りょうしん さず せいしん びょうとう どうほう たが である。 人 間は、 理性と良 心、 とを授けられてあ り、 互いに同胞の精神 平等 2383 をもって行動しなければならない。

Vertical text



Hiragana are sometimes used to write words which would normally written with katakana to make them appear more "feminine", particularly in comic books and cartoons for young girls. In children's video games texts are often written entirely in hiragana or katakana.



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#### **Other syllabaries**

Blackfoot, Carrier, Celtiberian, Cherokee, Cree, Cypriot, Hiragana, Iberian, Inuktitut, Katakana, Kpelle, Loma, Mende, Ndjuká, Ojibwe, Vai, Yi

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