

Flash Card Practice Activities for Japanese Hiragana & Katakana for Beginners

It is much easier to learn to read hiragana and katakana than to write them. With the right kinds of activities, diligent students can learn to read the basic 46 hiragana in a few hours, and the 46 katakana in another few hours. You will more readily learn the writing once you have mastered hiragana and katakana reading recognition, so it is suggested you begin your learning work with the flash cards.

Start by printing the flash card PDFs out—you may decide to print either the entire 92 cards, or only the group you'll be focusing on first (hiragana or katakana). Print double-sided cards, or print the fronts and backs separately then attach them together. Next, separate the flash cards by cutting along the perforated lines. If you are unfamiliar with hiragana and katakana take the time to read the front and back of each flash card, paying close attention to the number and type of strokes used in each character. Many hiragana characters look similar, and so do many katakana; it is the number and type of strokes that will help to tell them apart.

Hiragana/Katakana Flash Card Drills (alone or with a partner): It is helpful to start with a few, perhaps 10, flash cards. Shuffle the flash cards and look at them one at a time. Say the name of the character on the top flash card, then look at the back to see if you got it right. Start two piles of flash cards. If correct, place it in one pile. If not, place it in another pile, to be reviewed again. Continue looking at the flash cards one at a time and placing them in the appropriate pile. When you are finished, you will know which characters you can read and which ones need more practice. Now put aside the ones you already know and study the flash cards you had difficulty with. When ready, repeat the activity with the difficult ones. As you gain mastery add more flash cards, until you know all 46 hiragana and all 46 katakana. Then, shuffle both groups of cards together to do a challenge round! You can repeat this simple activity from time to time to refresh your basic hiragana and katakana reading skills.

Hiragana/Katakana Chart Activity (alone or with a small group): This is an excellent activity to improve your hiragana/katakana recognition skills and become familiar with **gojūon** order—the way dictionaries, web searches, etc., are organized. Place all the flash cards on a large surface (the floor works well) face up, in random order. Then, try to put them into order as quickly as possible. For an extra challenge use a stopwatch.

Hiragana/Katakana Pick-up (small group): Place all the flash cards on a large surface face up, in order or mixed up. One person calls the name of a hiragana/katakana character and the other players try to quickly put their hand on it. The first one gets to keep it. Continue playing, and when all the flash cards are gone, count to see who has the most. The winner gets to be the “caller” for the next game!