

Frank's do-it-yourself kana cards

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This set of flash cards is meant to help you become fluent in the use of the Japanese hiragana and katakana syllabaries. I made it because I needed one myself and could not find it in the local bookshops (kanji cards were available, and I bought those; but kana cards weren't); if it helps you too, so much the better.

The romanisation system chosen for these cards is the Hepburn, which is the most widely used one. The Hepburn system tries to represent the Japanese pronunciation as faithfully as possible, and therefore appears inconsistent in places, especially in the S (sa **shi** su se so) and T (ta **chi** **tsu** te to) rows and derived combinations. The Kunrei system, the official romanisation system recommended by the Japanese government, is more uniform in its transcription of consonants (ta ti tu te to) and looks more logical, but produces spellings that do not immediately suggest the appropriate pronunciation (e.g. "Huzi" for "Fuji"). The rarely used Nippon system is very similar to the Kunrei system and even more regular. It is the only one of the three with a distinct romanisation for each kana sign: じ and ぢ, for example, from the Z and D rows, are respectively rendered as ji and ji in Hepburn, as zi and zi in Kunrei, and as zi and di in Nippon. I have therefore added the Nippon version in brackets to all the cards where the Hepburn rōmaji was ambiguous. This ensures that, for each side of each card, what appears on the other side is uniquely determined.

Each card has a kana symbol or symbol combination on one side and the corresponding rōmaji on the other side. The obvious way to use the cards for practice drills, or at least the one I use, is to draw cards at random and say (or write down) what should be on the other side. Thanks to the disambiguation mentioned above this can be done in either direction, from kana to rōmaji and vice versa. Of course, if you are just starting, you may limit yourself to the subset of kana you know; whereas, as you become more proficient, you may wish to drop some of the more

familiar cards and insist on the difficult ones.

The complete set consists of 10 double-sided sheets (20 printable pages) of 50 cards each, but you may choose to print smaller subsets as detailed below. Actually there are some blanks, so the total number of cards is only 428 instead of 500. It would have been possible to fit them on 9 sheets instead of 10, but only by completely ignoring the natural structure of the sets. This would have made it harder for you to print subsets and for me to avoid silly mistakes of the kind where the front and the back of a card no longer match. The essential core of the set is in the first two sheets, which show the hiragana and katakana rendering of the basic 46 syllables. The next two sheets, again one each for hiragana and katakana, list the voiced sound (dakuon) variants and the first part of the contracted sound (yōon) combinations. The fifth sheet, half for hiragana and half for katakana, has the remaining yōon combinations. These first five sheets are set in a serif font that imitates the traditional "Ming". The next five sheets contain exactly the same characters, in the same arrangement, but in a sans serif "Gothic" font. This modern font is perhaps less elegant, but it makes it a bit easier to distinguish the beginning and end of individual strokes, as in the cases of ㇶ versus ㇷ, or ㇸ versus ㇹ. It is of course useful to learn to recognise both; fortunately, this is much easier than you might think. As an extra bonus, I have added stroke order numbers to the Gothic versions (both hiragana and katakana) of the basic 46 syllables. The number appears near the beginning of the corresponding stroke. Note that textbooks (and font designers) disagree on the stroke count of some characters: for example, Henshall-Takagaki¹ lists ㇺ as having three strokes, while JFBP² says it has only one; similarly, both of the above texts draw the bottom

part of き and さ with a separate stroke, unlike what happens in the fonts used in this document. I have followed the stroke counts of Henshall-Takagaki, even when they seem weird for the shape of the character as drawn on the card.

The easiest way to turn this document into a set of cards is simply to print it (double sided of course!) and then cut each page into cards with a ruler and a sharp blade. However, ordinary 80 g/m² laser printer paper is a bit too thin for this purpose: the cards won't be very easy to handle (mixing the deck will be the hardest part) and it will be easy inadvertently to see by transparency what is on the other side of a card as you hold it up. Using heavier paper is usually difficult on most printers: unless the print path is straight, the sheet will jam. Besides, when cutting manually, it is unlikely that the cards will end up being all of exactly the same size. I was lucky enough to be able to take advantage of the professional services of the print shop of the University of Cambridge (thanks, Bruce!) and the results were outstanding. If you can afford to do something similar, it will be well worth it. To help with cutting, especially on a motorised guillotine, I have left a wide bottom margin of about 3 cm. To allow for small tolerances in positioning, I have not printed any cutting lines around the edges of the cards; but the grid printed on the back of this page may be used as a guide, since it corresponds exactly to the invisible grid on the other sheets.

A substantial amount of effort has gone into the production of these cards. I hereby donate this work to the public domain, so feel free to use these cards in any way you like without any obligation towards me. If you wish to print them out commercially and resell them in the hope of making lots of money, good luck to you — it's fine by me. The original file is and always will be freely available on the web as fms-kana.pdf (currently at the URLs above, but use a search engine if you find that my web pages have moved).

¹ K. Henshall, T. Takagaki, *A guide to learning hiragana and katakana*, Tuttle, 1990, 0-8048-1633-8.

² AJALT, *Japanese For Busy People I* (revised ed.), Kodansha, 1994, 4-7700-1882-7.

Cutting guide

Here is an index to the contents of this document, which may be useful if you only wish to print a subset of the cards.

Pages 1-2

Introduction,
reference cutting grid
and index

Pages 3-4

Hiragana basic syllables
(Ming-style typeface)

Pages 5-6

Katakana basic syllables
(Ming-style typeface)

Pages 7-8

Hiragana dakuon
and first part of yōon
(Ming-style typeface)

Pages 9-10

Katakana dakuon
and first part of yōon
(Ming-style typeface)

Pages 11-12

Remainder of hiragana
and katakana yōon
(Ming-style typeface)

Pages 13-14

Hiragana basic syllables
with stroke order numbers
(Gothic-style typeface)

Pages 15-16

Katakana basic syllables
with stroke order numbers
(Gothic -style typeface)

Pages 17-18

Hiragana dakuon
and first part of yōon
(Gothic -style typeface)

Pages 19-20

Katakana dakuon
and first part of yōon
(Gothic -style typeface)

Pages 21-22

Remainder of hiragana
and katakana yōon
(Gothic -style typeface)

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おこそとのほもよろを

えけせてねへめれ

うくすつぬふむゆるん

いきしちにひみり

あかさたなはまやらわ

O (o)
hiragana

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hiragana

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ざ	じ	ず	ぜ	ぞ
だ	ぢ	づ	で	ど
ば	び	ぶ	べ	ぼ
ぱ	ぴ	ぷ	ぺ	ぽ

きゃ	きゅ	きょ
しゃ	しゅ	しよ
ちゃ	ちゅ	ちよ
にゃ	にゅ	にょ
ひゃ	ひゅ	ひょ

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みよ りよ ぎよ じよ ぢよ

びゃ びゅ びよ

ぴゃ ぴゅ ぴよ

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ミヨ リヨ ギヨ ジヨ チヨ

ビヤ ビュ ビョ

ピヤ ピュ ピョ

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