



## A SIMPLE GUIDE TO PRONOUNCING ROMANIZED JAPANESE

Japanese is considered a difficult language for native English speakers, but the sounds it employs are actually rather simple. After learning a few brief rules you will be able to pronounce any Japanese word written in Roman letters because the sounds do not vary from word to word as they do in English.

Vowels are pronounced as follows:

'a' as in 'father'  
'i' as in 'macaroni'  
'u' as in 'hula'  
'e' as in 'egg'  
'o' as in 'go'

This applies even when the vowels are grouped together, as each vowel still retains its own sound. For example, the word 'sumie' ("black ink painting") is pronounced "sue"- "me"- "eh."

When 'y' is preceded by another consonant the two are read together as a blend. For example, 'kyu' sounds like the 'cu' in 'cute.' 'Tokyo,' therefore, has only two syllables—'tō' and 'kyō,' not three ("toe-key-oh").

Sometimes you may see an 'n' followed by an apostrophe, as in the word Man'yōshū (an ancient poetry collection). This simply indicates that the 'n' belongs with the previous syllable and is not blended with the 'y' that follows.

The vowels 'o' and 'u' often appear with short lines over them → ō, ū. These are long vowels—literally. The vowel is drawn out rather than stopped abruptly. Examples: Tōkyō, Kyōto, Ryūkyū, dōjō, shōgun.

Sometimes two letter 'i's appear together. This too means that the vowel should be drawn out. The word *ie*, for example means 'house,' or 'household,' while the word *iee* means 'no.'

Double consonants indicate that one should stop briefly in the middle of the pair before continuing:

Sapporo → "Sap-poro"  
Hokkaido → "Hok-kaidō"

There are really only two unusual sounds (from an English speaker's point of view) to worry about: (1) 'ts' appears before the vowel 'u,' as in the verb 'tsukeru' (to attach); the 'r' is a "flap-r," as in the upper-class British pronunciation of the word 'very.'

Practice examples:

karate	kamikaze	banzai	karaoke	Kyan
sake	Honda	bonsai	Nagamine	Matsubayashi-ryū