Characters used in Japan : *Kanji* and *Kana*

1. Three kinds of characters used in Japan

The Japanese writing system uses three kinds of characters, which are：

Kanji, *Hiragana* and *Katakana*.

	Meaning	Reading
Kanji 漢字	Each *Kanji* has meaning(s)	*Kanji* has one or more different readings.
Hiragana ひらがな	*Hiragana* and *Katakana* have no	Each *Hiragana* and *Katakana* has one
Katakana カタカナ	meaning in and of themselves	reading (pronunciation)

1-1. *Kanji* 漢字（Chinese characters）

Kanji are used for all kinds of names, main bodies of verbs and so on. There are 2,136 *Kanji* characters for general use, 1,006 for education in elementary school.

(1) Hieroglyphic characters

Characters made from its shape.

ex. 山[*yama*] 川[*kawa*] 日[*hi*] 目[*me*] 火[*hi*] 木[*ki*]
(mountain) (river) (sun) (eye) (fire) (tree)

(2) Ideographic characters

Characters with explaining elements.

ex. 林[*hayashi*] (woods)   森[*mori*] (forest)

東[*higashi*](east) ＝ 日[*hi*](The sun) rises up behind 木[*ki*](a tree)

(3) Phonetic characters

Characters with a part of which gives its pronunciation.

ex. 横[*ō, yoko*](beside) has the same sound as 黄[*ō, ki*](yellow)

1-2. *Katakana* カタカナ（means fraction *Kana*）

There are about fifty *Katakana* which are rather angular with straight strokes. They originated from fractions taken from *Kanji*.

ex. 阿→ア 伊→イ 宇→ウ 江→エ 於→オ

The primary use of *Katakana* is for foreign or foreign like words that have been integrated into the Japanese language. *Katakana*, like *Hiragana*, is a phonetic alphabet.

ex. ペン[*pen*] ガラス[*garasu*] カラオケ[*karaoke*]
pen   glass   karaoke (This is a Japanese word though)

1-3. *Hiragana* ひらがな（means plain *Kana*）

Hiragana is of the same number and reading as *Katakana*. They have round strokes originated from script style of *Kanji*.

ex. 安→あ 以→い 宇→う 衣→え 於→お

Hiragana is the first Japanese alphabet learnt by children. This enables youngsters to be able to write the language as pronounced, even though they have not yet mastered *Kanji*. Usually a word writen in *Hiragana* does not give a unique meaning. We generally use them to give grammar to sentences in conjunction with *Kanji*.

ex. かわ[*kawa*](river, skin, ...) ひ[*hi*] (sun, fire, ratio, ...)

2. Japanese personal names

A Japanese personal name consists of a family name and a following given name. It is usually written in *Kanji* which have meanings. *Kanji* may have a few different pronunciations, and so *Hiragana* (or *Katakana*) is used to show how to read the name.

Therefore, Japanese parents consider their baby's name both in *Kanji* and *Hiragana* (or *Katakana*).

For example：

One of popular boy's names "ゆうと[*Yūto*]" can take "勇人" and "優人". "勇人" means "brave man" while "優人" means "kind man".

3. Let's write your name in *Katakana* and/or *Kanji*

Remember Japanese people do not necessarily recognize in the exact way you pronounce. Basically Japanese people think a syllable cannot end with a consonant and put an excessive vowel when they read. (e.g. and → *ando*)

It especially is difficult to give *Kanji* and/or *Katakana* to your names because there are no suitable pronunciation in Japanese such as [*di*][*pi*][*ra*][*ru*][*ja*][*fa*][*we*] and so on.

Ask your Japanese instructor to help you find your name in *Kanji* and/or *Katakana*.

	Family name	Given name
Regular spelling		
Hiragana		
Katakana		
Kanji (Example 1)		
Kanji (Example 2)		