

Distinguishing Katakana and Kanji by Stroke Types

The K-code Learning Method

Learn katakana and kanji strokes with six stroke types and three simple rules.



1 Common Challenges in Learning Japanese Characters

Learner's View | Distinguishing

Distinguishing Similar Characters

ソ/ン, シ/ッ, チ/千/千 ...

They look similar. What makes them different?

Teacher's View | Explaining

Explaining Shapes

Instructions like "make this longer" or "sweep this side" may not be clear enough.

Shared View | Sharing

Challenges in Asking Questions and Checking Writing

Learners may not know what to ask, and errors may remain.



K-code Helps Overcome These Challenges

With 6 stroke types and 3 rules, K-code helps learners distinguish similar characters, describe stroke length, direction, and movement, and communicate using common terms.

2 What Is K-code?

K-code is a learning method that represents characters as combinations of stroke types rather than shapes to be memorized. Learners distinguish characters by their line shapes and stroke movements.

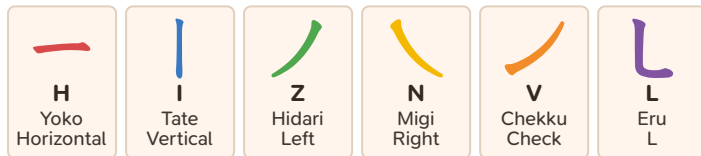
TPR Method

Uses body movements to trace character strokes (e.g., horizontal and vertical strokes) with an arm or finger. Effective for learners studying in their first language and for small classes.

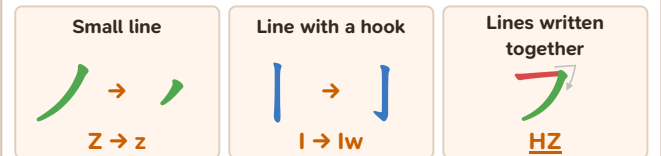
Alphabet Method

Uses alphabet letters to represent stroke types. Useful in multilingual classrooms and for providing feedback.

K-code's Six Stroke Types



Three Rules



3 What K-code Helps You Do



Distinguishing

Distinguish similar characters by their stroke types.



Explaining

Explain stroke length, direction, and movement.



Communicating

Communicate using common terms.

4 K-code May Help Learners Write More Kanji and Make Fewer Writing Errors.

Learners first study word meanings and pronunciations, then review the kanji using K-code. The following changes have been reported.

Vocabulary-first Learning + K-code Flow

Know and choose the word → Practice the reading → Learn line shapes and writing movements → Write

Kanji correctly written by more than half of the learners

22.3% → 64.2%

Approximately a 2.9-fold increase

Total writing errors per learner

77.8 errors → 52.6 errors

Approximately a 32% decrease

These results are from instruction combining vocabulary-first learning with K-code. They do not represent the effect of K-code alone. (Saegusa, 2026, Master's thesis, p. 71)

5 Useful in These Situations

For beginning learners from non-kanji backgrounds

When learners need to distinguish characters by stroke types rather than overall shapes.

Community Japanese Classes

When a common language and study time are limited

Pre-departure training organizations

When introducing essential written Japanese quickly before learners arrive in Japan.

Names, addresses, and other essential writing

When learners need to write essential kanji first.



Teacher

It became easier to explain how to write kanji, and instruction took less time.



Teacher

A K-code introduction helped learners become more autonomous learners.



Learner

When I say the code while writing, I make fewer mistakes and can write well-proportioned characters.



Learner

Practice became more systematic. Now I can write kanji more accurately and neatly.

in Different Learning Settings

Using K-code

K-code can be used with apps and printed materials in a variety of learning settings. Here are two examples: one for katakana and one for kanji.



1 Example: Learning Katakana with Apps

Prep Open the Katakana Finder app

Use the [Q Katakana Finder] button — at the top of the screen on PC, at the bottom on mobile.

Input example

Michael Jackson

Search result example

マイケル・ジャクソン

01 Katakana Finder

Enter and search a word

Enter the word you want to practice and check its katakana form.

02 Katakana Finder → a practice sheet

Create a practice sheet

Click the [練習シートを作る] button to create a character practice sheet with grid squares, then print it.

03 Katakana Finder + a practice sheet

Write while looking

Practice on the sheet while looking at K-code and the stroke-order animation.

04 Katakana Motion

Compare similar characters one by one

For similar characters such as ソ/ン, use Katakana Motion to check them side by side.



Katakana Finder | Input and search result



Practice Sheet | Grid squares image



Katakana Motion | Compare similar characters

2 Example: Learning Kanji Starting from Words

Vocabulary-first Learning + K-code Flow

01 Know and choose the word

Choose a word that the learner already knows or wants to write.
Example: 日本

02 Practice the reading

Example: 日本 → にほん

03 Learn line shapes and writing movements

Use K-code to show line shapes and stroke movements.
Air-write while saying the K-code.

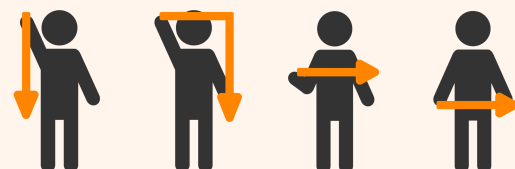
04 Write

Practice writing on a character worksheet.

Kanji Strokes



Air-writing



K-code

TPR Method

Tate

YokoTate

Yoko

Yoko

Alphabet Method

I

H

H

H

