

FACT SHEET

1. To write in Japanese, one must learn four different writing styles: *hiragana*, *katakana*, *kanji*, and *romaji*.
 - ***Hiragana*** is the first writing system taught to Japanese children (sort of like learning the A, B, Cs). There are 46 basic hiragana characters, and all sounds in the Japanese language can be expressed with just hiragana. It is used to express simple words, conjugations at the ends of verbs, and parts of speech.
 - ***Katakana*** also has 46 characters and represents all sounds spoken, but it is mainly used to express foreign words, names, and newer words in Japanese vocabulary.
 - ***Romaji*** uses the same alphabet as English to spell out the sounds of Japanese words.
 - ***Kanji*** is the most difficult system. It was brought to Japan more than 1200 years ago from China. It is made up of pictograms, which are pictures representing what the word is trying to convey. The Japanese adopted the Chinese characters and put Japanese readings to them. While many characters mean the same thing in Chinese and Japanese, the readings of the characters sound different. There are between 5,000 to 10,000 kanji used in Japanese, but most Japanese do not know all of them. By the time Japanese students graduate from high school, they are expected to know over 2,000 characters. Kanji characters can often be read in different ways, which makes reading even more difficult.