

五十音／ごじゅうおん／Fifty Sounds

(adapted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gojuon>)

Introduction:

「ごじゅうおん」 refers to the Japanese ordering of kana. Literally, the word means "50 sounds." Despite the name, it only contains 46 commonly used symbols.

「ごじゅうおん」 contains all the basic kana, but it does not include:

- kana "partners" with two little lines or a circle such as: が or ぼ.
- half-size kana used in blends such as: きゃ or みゅ
- small "tsu" such as: まって

「ごじゅうおん」 order is the system used most often in Japan for collating dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. This method is an ancient invention that originates from the consonant order of Sanskrit. The earliest examples date from the period 1004-1028.

Gojuun Order - Basic Information:

The basic order of the 10 columns is: A, Ka, Sa, Ta, Na, Ha, Ma, Ya, Ra, Wa.

The very last kana is N. A mnemonic to help you remember this order is:

Ah, Kana Symbols: Take Note How Many You Read Well.

Within each column, there are usually 5 sounds. Exceptions are the Ya and Wa columns. The order of the sounds is: a, i, u, e, o.

As with English alphabetization, the first symbol in a word determines the first level of ordering. In other words, any words starting with あ or ア will come before words starting with い or イ which come before words starting with う or ウ and so on.

Gojuun Order - Specific Details:

- Hiragana and Katakana are mixed together.
But when everything else is the same the rule is: hiragana first, katakana next.
For example: いぶ、イブ、いぶき
- Kana "partners" (with two lines or a circle) are treated the same as the basic symbol.
But when everything else is the same the rule is: basic symbol first, partner next.
For example: すすき、すずき、すずしい、すすむ
- Half-size *ya*, *yu*, *yo* used in blends are treated the same way as full-size.
But when everything else is the same the rule is: large first, small next.
For example: きよ、きよ、きよい、きよい、きょう
- The small *tsu* is treated the same way as the full-size *tsu*.
But when everything else is the same the rule is: large first, small next.
For example: まつ、まったく、まつば、まとう