

GUIDE TO JAPANESE NAMES AND PRONUNCIATION

Japanese Names:

Japanese names are written family name first, followed by the given name. For example, in the name Tokugawa Ieyasu, the family name is “Tokugawa” and the given name is “Ieyasu.”

Writers, monks, poets, artists, are often known by their given name—a pen name, artist name, or religious name. Examples include “Basho” (poet), “Saicho” (monk), “Hiroshige” (artist).

The imperial family has no family name; its members are referred to by their title and given name. While living, the Emperor is respectfully referred to as “Tenno Heika” (“His Majesty the Emperor”). After his death, the Emperor is referred to by his “reign name.” For example, “Meiji Tenno” refers to the “Meiji Emperor” Mutsuhito, who reigned from 1868-1912 (Meiji period); the “Taisho Emperor” Yoshihito reigned from 1912-1926 (Taisho period); the “Showa Emperor” Hirohito reigned from 1926-1989 (Showa period); and the current emperor, Akihito will be known as the Heisei Emperor after his death.

Japanese Pronunciation:

Vowels are pronounced approximately as in Italian: just remember “*pasta, prego, and tutti frutti.*” Long marks (known as “macrons”) over the vowels “o” and “u” indicate not a change in sound but rather a prolongation in time, roughly twice as long as normal. The distinction between short and long vowels is a basic part of the Japanese language, and can often distinguish the meaning of two words: for example, *kosho* means “negotiations,” while *kosho* means “broken”; *kuki* means “stem” but *kuki* is “air.”

By convention, macrons are usually omitted from very common proper nouns like Tokyo, Kyushu, and Shinto (which should properly be Tokyo, Kyushu, and Shinto), and from common nouns that have become anglicized and do not appear in italics, such as “daimyo” and “shogun.”

A note on the display of macrons on Web browsers: as vowels with long marks are not part of the ASCII character set, they are often difficult to transmit digitally across platforms. The convention used to deal with this problem is to use the circumflex as a substitute: hence, you may increasingly see “ô” and “û” instead of proper macrons (e.g. “o” and “u”).

Japanese syllables fall into three categories: a) vowel; b) consonant(s) followed by a vowel; c) “n” sound (no vowel). The following is a list of Japanese names and words that have been divided into syllables. Note that they are divided between the vowel and the following consonant, between two vowels, and after the final “n” sound.

Heike	=	He/i/ke	Yoshitsune	=	Yo/shi/tsu/ne
Tokugawa	=	To/ku/ga/wa	Kamakura	=	Ka/ma/ku/ra
Tokyo	=	To/kyo	shamisen	=	sha/mi/se/n