

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND JAPANESE WRITING SYSTEMS

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Abstract: *The English and Japanese writing systems differ significantly in structure, symbols, and usage, yet they share some similarities. English employs the Latin alphabet with 26 letters, while Japanese uses a combination of kanji (logographic characters), hiragana, and katakana (syllabic scripts). One key similarity is that both languages have adapted foreign words into their writing systems—English through loanwords and Japanese through katakana. Additionally, both systems use punctuation marks and spacing to enhance readability, though Japanese does so to a lesser extent.*

The main differences lie in complexity and script variety. English follows a relatively simple alphabetic system where letters represent sounds, whereas Japanese requires mastery of thousands of kanji characters along with two syllabaries. Moreover, Japanese writing allows for both horizontal and vertical text orientation, unlike English, which is strictly horizontal. These distinctions highlight the unique linguistic evolution of each language, reflecting their cultural and historical contexts.

Keywords: *English writing system, Japanese writing system, Latin alphabet, Kanji, Hiragana, Katakana, Logographic characters, Syllabic scripts, Loanwords, Punctuation, Horizontal writing, Vertical writing, Phonetic representation, Introduction*

Languages around the world use diverse writing systems that reflect their unique histories and cultural developments. English and Japanese, despite being linguistically unrelated, have writing systems that serve the same fundamental purpose: communication through written symbols. The English writing system is based on the Latin alphabet, consisting of 26 letters that represent phonetic sounds. In contrast, the Japanese writing system is more complex, incorporating three distinct scripts: kanji (logographic characters), hiragana, and katakana (syllabic scripts).

While these two systems differ in structure and complexity, they share some similarities, such as the adaptation of foreign words and the use of punctuation for clarity. Understanding the similarities and differences between English and Japanese writing helps in appreciating the linguistic diversity of human communication and the challenges faced by

language learners. This paper explores these aspects in detail, highlighting how each system functions and evolves within its cultural context.

Main Part: One of the most significant differences between English and Japanese writing systems is their structure. English uses the Latin alphabet, consisting of 26 letters that represent individual phonetic sounds. In contrast, Japanese writing incorporates three scripts:

Kanji – logographic characters borrowed from Chinese, each representing a meaning rather than a sound.

Hiragana – a syllabic script used for native Japanese words, grammatical elements, and verb endings.

Katakana – another syllabic script, primarily used for foreign words, onomatopoeia, and emphasis.

English is a purely alphabetic system, meaning words are formed by combining letters in a linear sequence. Japanese, however, blends logographic and syllabic scripts, making it more complex in terms of reading and writing.

Second difference might be considered that the English writing system is primarily phonetic, meaning that letters represent sounds (though pronunciation rules can be irregular). In contrast, Japanese relies on both phonetic and logographic elements. Hiragana and katakana represent syllables, making them easier to learn, whereas kanji requires memorization of thousands of characters. This difference makes English writing more accessible to learners, while Japanese demands a greater level of memorization and script-switching skills.

Another key difference is the direction of writing. English is strictly written from left to right, with lines moving from top to bottom. Japanese, on the other hand, can be written in two directions:

Horizontally from left to right (common in modern texts, websites, and scientific writing).

Vertically from top to bottom, with columns moving from right to left (traditional in books, newspapers, and calligraphy).

This flexibility in Japanese contrasts with the fixed horizontal direction of English writing. English writing uses spaces between words to improve readability, while Japanese writing traditionally does not use spaces, as different scripts help distinguish words. Instead, Japanese relies on kanji to separate words visually. However, modern Japanese writing has incorporated more punctuation marks, such as periods (。), commas (、), and quotation marks (「」), similar to English punctuation. Loanwords and Foreign Influences: Both English and Japanese have borrowed words from other languages, but they integrate them

differently. English adopts foreign words directly ("pizza" from Italian), while Japanese modifies foreign words using katakana (ピザ (piza) for "pizza"). This adaptation system allows Japanese to absorb foreign vocabulary while maintaining phonetic consistency.

Conclusion: Despite their fundamental differences, both English and Japanese writing systems serve the same purpose: effective written communication. English follows a simple phonetic alphabet with consistent left-to-right writing, whereas Japanese incorporates multiple scripts, flexible writing directions, and a mix of logographic and phonetic elements. While English is easier to learn due to its alphabetic nature, Japanese offers a richer, more complex system that reflects its historical and cultural evolution. Understanding these similarities and differences provides valuable insight into the diversity of human language and communication.

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