

# Labyrinth of Languages

## Home Study Assignment #4: Japanese

As you've learned in class, Japanese uses four different writing systems! These are called *kanji*, *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *romaji*:

- ◆ *Kanji* consists of several thousand Chinese characters. They retain the same *meaning* in Japanese, but the character doesn't give a clue about its *pronunciation*. For example, 六 means "six," and there's no way of telling that it's pronounced "roku". As you see, unlike Chinese, a single kanji character can represent a two-syllable word.
- ◆ *Hiragana* consists of 50 phonetic characters (mostly curved, and almost all simpler than Chinese characters).
- ◆ *Katakana* also consists of 50 phonetic characters (mostly straight or slightly curved). They are used primarily for telling Japanese speakers how to pronounce foreign words. For example, "Canada" is written カナダ, which are the three katakana characters for **ka**, **na**, and **da**.
- ◆ *Romaji* consists of the 26-letter Roman alphabet. These characters are used primarily for telling foreigners how to pronounce Japanese words.

A typical Japanese sentence might combine kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Kanji is used for the main words; hiragana for prefixes, suffixes, and minor words; and katakana for foreign words.

There is a small complication: in Hiragana and Katakana, two short slanted lines after a character change the consonant from *k* to *g*, or from *s* to *z*, or from *t* to *d*, or from *h* to *b* (or *p*).

Using your Katakana list, first write your name in Japanese. Then write the syllables for the Katakana words listed below, and guess what they mean, selecting from the following list: *America*, *camera*, *computer*, *department store*, *elevator*, *escalator*, *hamburger*.

エレベーター

エスカレーター

アメリカ

デパート

カメラ