

LEVEL

1



Japanese

Introduction



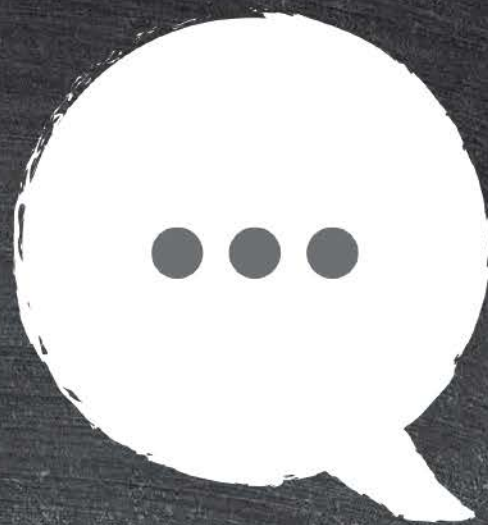
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LESSON NOTES

Basic Bootcamp #1

Self Introduction/Basic Greetings

CONTENTS

- 2 Vocabulary
- 2 Sample Sentences
- 2 Grammar

1

VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English	Class
こんにちは	こんにちは	kon'nichi wa	hello	
わたし	わたし	watashi	I, me	pronoun
はじめまして	はじめまして	hajimemashite	Nice to meet you.	expression
よろしくお 願い します	よろしくお ねが い します	yoroshiku onagai shimasu	It's a pleasure to meet you.	
どうぞ	どうぞ	dōzo	please	

SAMPLE SENTENCES

<p>みなさん、こんにちは。 <i>Mina-san, Kon'nichiwa.</i></p> <p>Hello, everyone.</p>	<p>わたしはカウンセラーです。 <i>Watashi wa kaunserā desu.</i></p> <p>I'm a counselor.</p>
<p>こんにちは。はじめまして。 <i>Kon'nichiwa. Hajimemashite.</i></p> <p>Hello. Nice to meet you.</p>	<p>たなかたろうです。よろしくおねがいしま す。 <i>Tanaka Tarō desu. Yoroshiku onegai shimasu.</i></p> <p>I'm Taro Tanaka. It's a pleasure to meet you.</p>
<p>太郎の母です。どうぞよろしく。 <i>Taro no haha desu. Dōzo yoroshiku.</i></p> <p>I'm Taro's mother. Nice to meet you.</p>	

GRAMMAR

Basic Bootcamp #1: Self Introduction/Basic Greetings

The Focus of This Lesson is to Teach You Some Japanese Essentials to Get You Speaking Right from Your First Lesson.

Today's phrases are used when we introduce ourselves:

A:こんにちは。はじめまして。私は田中です。

A: Kon'nichi wa. Hajimemashite. Watashi wa Tanaka desu.

A: "Hello. Nice to meet you. My name is Tanaka."

B:私は鈴木です。よろしくお願ひします。

B: Watashi wa Suzuki desu. Yoroshiku o-negai shimasu.

B: "My name is Suzuki. Nice to meet you."

Vocabulary and Lesson Notes

こんにちは

Kon'nichi wa

This phrase is the Japanese equivalent of "hello" and can be used at any time of day.

わたし

Watashi

The word *watashi* (わたし) means "I" or "me." This is a polite way for both males and females to refer to themselves.

は

wa

"Wa" is a particle that follows the topic you are going to be talking about (often called the topic marking particle). Think of it as the equivalent to "as for" in English.

です

Desu

This word is called a copula and refers to one type of "to be" verb. In the above conversation, we showed the construction as *watashi wa [name] desu* (わたしは [name] です, My name is [name]). *Desu* will always come at the end of a sentence. For more information on the copula, please see Conjugation Lesson #1.

はじめまして

Hajimemashite

This phrase means "nice to meet you," and we use it when meeting someone for the first time. We often follow this phrase with the next one.

よろしくお願ひします

Yoroshiku onegai shimasu

We often use this phrase when meeting people for the first time. There is no English equivalent, but literally, this phrase roughly translates to, "Please look favorably upon me." Using this phrase shows respect for the person you are meeting, and also indicates that you are looking forward to a good relationship with them. Whether you are meeting one person or fifty, using this phrase will make a great impression.

To make this phrase even more polite, you can attach the word *dōzo* (どうぞ) to the beginning to create *Dōzo yoroshiku onegai shimasu* (どうぞよろしく申し上げます). On the other hand, if you are speaking to someone who is much lower in status than yourself, you can shorten this phrase to simply *yoroshiku* (よろしく).

Names in Japanese

In Japanese, we give our full names by saying or writing our last name before our first name. In formal situations, it is common for people to introduce themselves using their full name or only their last name. When addressing other people you are not familiar with or are higher than you in status, it is important to attach the suffix *san* (さん) to their name. Be careful, however, not to attach *san* (さん) to your own name!

LESSON NOTES

Basic Bootcamp #2

Basic Japanese sentence structure

CONTENTS

- 2 Vocabulary
- 2 Sample Sentences
- 2 Grammar

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VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English	Class
日本人	にほんじん	Nihon-jin	Japanese	
日本	にほん	Nihon	Japan	proper noun
アメリカ	アメリカ	Amerika	America (the U.S.A.)	proper noun
アメリカ人	あめりかじん	Amerika-jin	American (Nationality)	
イギリス	イギリス	Igirisu	England	noun
イギリス人	イギリスじん	Igirisu-jin	English, British (nationality)	
中国	ちゅうごく	Chūgoku	China	proper noun
中国人	ちゅうごくじん	Chūgoku-jin	Chinese (nationality)	

SAMPLE SENTENCES

<p>夏子は日本人です。 <i>Natsuko wa Nihonjin desu.</i></p> <p>Natsuko is Japanese.</p>	<p>日本に住んでいます。 I live in Japan.</p>
<p>アメリカは大きいです。 <i>Amerika wa ōkii desu.</i></p> <p>The U.S. is huge.</p>	<p>ホワイトさんはアメリカ人です。 <i>Howaito-san wa Amerika-jin desu.</i></p> <p>Mr. White is American.</p>
<p>イギリスのクッキーはおいしい。 <i>Igirisu no kukkī wa oishii.</i></p> <p>British cookies are delicious.</p>	<p>私はイギリス人です。 <i>Watashi wa Igirisujin desu.</i></p> <p>I'm British.</p>
<p>私の出身は中国です。 I'm from China.</p>	<p>ヨウメイさんは中国人です。 <i>Yōmei-san wa chūgokujin desu.</i></p> <p>Yao Ming is Chinese.</p>

GRAMMAR

Basic Bootcamp #2: Basic Japanese Sentence Structure

The Focus of This Lesson is Talking About Yourself in Japanese.

In this lesson, we learned the following phrases:

A: こんにちは。私はナオミです。日本人です。

A: Kon'nichi wa. Watashi wa Naomi desu. Nihon-jin desu.

A: "Hello, I'm Naomi. I'm Japanese."

B: こんにちは。私はピーターです。アメリカ人です。

B: Kon'nichi wa. Watashi wa Pītā desu. Amerika-jin desu.

B: "Hello, I'm Peter. I'm American."

Talking About Yourself

To talk about one's nationality, you add the word for person, *jin* (人) to the name of a country. Let's take a look at some examples.

Countries and Nationalities:

1. **日本**
Nihon
"Japan"
2. **日本人**
Nihon-jin
"Japanese person"
3. **アメリカ**
Amerika
"America"
4. **アメリカ人**
Amerika-jin
"American person"

Other Countries and Nationalities:

1. **イギリス**
Igirisu
"England"

2. イギリス人
Igirisu-jin
"English person"
3. 中国
Chūgoku
"China"
4. 中国人
Chūgoku-jin
"Chinese person"

Talking About Nationality:

1. (私は) アメリカ人です。
(Watashi wa) amerika-jin desu.
I'm American.

☆Note that when talking about yourself, you don't need to say *watashi wa* if it's already understood that you are talking about yourself. In that case, your nationality plus *desu* is enough.

More examples:

1. 私たちはアメリカ人です。
Watashi-tachi wa amerika-jin desu.
"We're American."
2. あなたは日本人です。
Anata wa nihon-jin desu.
"You're Japanese."

LESSON NOTES

Basic Bootcamp #3

Useful Phrases for Learning Japanese

CONTENTS

- 2 Kanji
- 2 Kana
- 2 Romanization
- 3 English
- 3 Vocabulary
- 4 Sample Sentences
- 5 Grammar

3

KANJI

1. A: すみません。
2. A: これは日本語で何ですか。
3. B: "しょうゆ。"
4. A: すみません。もう一度お願いします。
5. B: "しょうゆ。"
6. A: すみません。ゆっくりお願いします。
7. B: "しょ・う・ゆ"

KANA

1. A: すみません。
2. A: これはにほんごでなんですか。
3. B: "しょうゆ。"
4. A: すみません。もういちどおねがいします。
5. B: "しょうゆ。"
6. A: すみません。ゆっくりおねがいします。
7. B: "しょ・う・ゆ"

ROMANIZATION

CONT'D OVER

1. A: Sumimasen.
2. A: Kore wa Nihon-go de nan desu ka?
3. B: "Shōyu."
4. A: Sumimasen. Mō ichi-do onegai shimasu.
5. B: "Shōyu."
6. A: Sumimasen. Yukkuri onegai shimasu.
7. B: "Sho-u-yu."

ENGLISH

1. A: Excuse me.
2. A: How do you say this in Japanese?
3. B: "Shōyu."
4. A: Excuse me, could you say that one more time, please?
5. B: "Shōyu."
6. A: Excuse me, could you say it slowly, please?
7. B: "Sho-u-yu."

VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English	Class
すみません	すみません	Sumimasen	Excuse me	
英語	えいご	eigo	English language	
日本語	にほんご	nihongo	Japanese language	
これ	これ	kore	this	
お願いします	おねがいします	onagai shimasu	please	
何	なに	nani	what	interrogative word
もう一度	もういちど	mouichido, mō ichi-do	once again	phrase
ゆっくり	ゆっくり	yukkuri	slowly	

SAMPLE SENTENCES

<p>すみません。ここは私の席だと思っ たのです。 <i>Sumimasen. Koko wa watashi no seki da to omou no desu ga.</i></p> <p>Excuse me, I think this is my seat you are sitting on.</p>	<p>お客様、すみません。 <i>O-kyaku-sama, sumimasen.</i></p> <p>Excuse me, sir/ma'am.</p>
<p>英語がわかりますか。 <i>Eigo ga wakarimasu ka.</i></p> <p>Do you understand English?</p>	<p>日本語、わかりますか。 <i>Nihongo, wakarimasu ka.</i></p> <p>Do you understand Japanese?</p>
<p>これはほんです。 <i>Kore wa hon desu.</i></p> <p>This is a book.</p>	<p>コーヒー、お願いします。 <i>Kōhī onagai shimasu.</i></p> <p>Coffee please.</p>

<p>ラッシーは何ですか。 <i>Rassī wa nan desu ka.</i></p> <p>What's lassi?</p>	<p>すみません。もう一度お願いします。 <i>Sumimasen. Mō ichi-do onegai shimasu.</i></p> <p>I'm sorry. Could you say that again?</p>
<p>ゆっくり、お願いします。 <i>Yukkuri onegai shimasu.</i></p> <p>Slowly please.</p>	

GRAMMAR

Basic Bootcamp #3: Useful Phrases for Learning Japanese

The Focus of This Lesson is to Learn Some Japanese Phrases That Come in Handy When Learning More Japanese

1. **マービン:** すみません。これは日本語で何ですか。
Mābin: Sumimasen. Kore wa Nihon-go de nan desu ka?
Marvin: "Excuse me. How do you say this in Japanese?"
2. **ウエイトレス:** "しょうゆ".
Uētoresu: Shōyu.
Waitress: "Shoyu."
3. **マービン:** すみません。もう一度お願いします。
Mābin: Sumimasen. Mō ichi-do onegai shimasu.
Marvin: "Excuse me, could you say that one more time, please?"
4. **ウエイトレス:** "しょうゆ".
Uētoresu: Shōyu.
Waitress: "Shoyu."
5. **マービン:** すみません。ゆっくりお願いします。
Mābin: Sumimasen. Yukkuri onegai shimasu.
Marvin: "Excuse me, could you say it slowly, please?"
6. **ウエイトレス:** "しょ・う・ゆ"
Uētoresu: Sho-u-yu.
Waitress: "Sho-u-yu."

すみません。

Sumimasen.

"Excuse me."

Sumimasen translates to "excuse me" in English. We often use it to try to get someone's attention when we are about to say something or ask a question.

「word」は日本語で何ですか。

[*word*] *wa Nihon-go de nan desu ka?*

"How do you say (word) in Japanese?"

You can use this phrase when you don't know what something is called in Japanese. In the blank, you can put an English word or point to something and use *kore wa* (これは, "this") like Marvin did in the dialogue.

If someone uses a Japanese word that you are not familiar with and you would like to ask for the English translation, you can use the same structure to ask what it is called in English:

英語で何ですか。

Eigo de nan desu ka?

"What is it in English?"

お願いします。

Onegai shimasu.

"Please."

Onegai shimasu is a phrase that means "please." You can use this phrase when you are asking for something or asking someone to do something for you.

You can pair the following two phrases with *onegai shimasu* to ask someone to repeat something.

もう一度

Mō ichi-do

"One more time"

ゆっくり

Yukkuri

"Slowly"

LESSON NOTES

Basic Bootcamp #4

Counting I

CONTENTS

2 Grammar

4

GRAMMAR

Basic Bootcamp #4: Counting I

The Focus of This Lesson is to Teach the Numbers 1 to 100 in Japanese

Dialog

Setting: Kazuki is at the gym, counting while doing exercises on a weight lifting machine.

Kazuki: 1 (ichi), 2 (ni), 3 (san), 4 (yon), 5 (go), 6, (roku) 7 (nana), 8 (hachi), 9 (kyū), 10 (jū)

Vocabulary and Lesson Notes

Numbers from 0-10:

0	<i>zero / rei</i>	〇 (or 零)
1	<i>ichi</i>	一
2	<i>ni</i>	二
3	<i>san</i>	三
4	<i>shi / yon</i>	四
5	<i>go</i>	五
6	<i>roku</i>	六
7	<i>shichi / nana</i>	七
8	<i>hachi</i>	八
9	<i>kyū</i>	九
10	<i>jū</i>	十

Numbers from 11-20:

11	<i>jū-ichi</i>	十一
----	----------------	----

12	<i>jū-ni</i>	十二
13	<i>jū-san</i>	十三
14	<i>jū-yon</i>	十四
15	<i>jū-go</i>	十五
16	<i>jū-roku</i>	十六
17	<i>jū-nana</i>	十七
18	<i>jū-hachi</i>	十八
19	<i>jū-kyū</i>	十九
20	<i>ni-jū</i>	二十

Multiples of 10 up to 100:

10	<i>jū</i>	十
20	<i>ni-jū</i>	二十
30	<i>san-jū</i>	三十
40	<i>yon-jū</i>	四十
50	<i>go-jū</i>	五十
60	<i>roku-jū</i>	六十
70	<i>nana-jū</i>	七十
80	<i>hachi-jū</i>	八十
90	<i>kyū-jū</i>	九十
100	<i>hyaku</i>	百

Some more numbers discussed in this lesson:

25

ni-jū-go

二十五

43

yon-jū-san

四十三

77

nana-jū-nana

七十七

92

kyū-jū-ni

九十二

48

yon-jū-hachi

四十八

55

go-jū-go

五十五

100

hyaku

百

Culture Tip

The Japanese are very superstitious when it comes to numbers. Many people believe that certain numbers are auspicious, while other numbers are unlucky ones you should avoid. This originates from the fact that many Japanese words are homophones. Certain numbers have pronunciations that are similar to other words that have either good or bad connotations.

For example, the Japanese believe the number four is very unlucky and they avoid it whenever possible. The reason is that the pronunciation of the number four (四, *shi*) in Japanese is very similar in sound to the word for "death" (死, *shi*). We consider the number nine (九, *kyū*) to be unlucky for the same reason—one of the pronunciations is *ku*, which is the same as the word for "suffering" [(苦, *ku*)]. Because of these beliefs, many hospitals and apartment buildings do not have room numbers with four or nine in them.

On the other hand, the Japanese believe that the numbers seven (七, *shichi*) and eight (八, *hachi*) are lucky numbers. The concept of "lucky seven" is largely a Western one, but the Seven Deities of Good Fortune (七福神, *shichifukujin*) are one instance of the number seven signifying luck in Japanese folk religion. The Japanese consider the number eight (八, *hachi*) to be lucky because of the way the strokes in the Chinese character gradually broaden out, which is connected to the idea of growing prosperous.

LESSON NOTES

Basic Bootcamp #5

Counting from 100 to 100,000 in Japanese

CONTENTS

- Dialogue - Japanese
 - Kanji
 - English
 - Rōmaji
 - Hiragana
- Vocabulary
- Sample sentences
- Grammar

#5

DIALOGUE - JAPANESE

KANJI

1. A: 百!
2. B: 二百!
3. A: 五百!
4. B: 千!
5. A: 千三百!
6. B: 千六百!
7. A: 二千!
8. B: 三千!
9. A: 八千!
10. A: やった!

ENGLISH

1. A: 100!
2. B: 200!
3. A: 500!
4. B: 1,000!
5. A: 1,300!
6. B: 1,600!
7. A: 2,000!
8. B: 3,000!
9. A: 8,000!
10. A: Yay!

RŌMAJI

1. A : Hyaku!
2. B : Ni-hyaku!
3. A : Go-hyaku!
4. B : Sen!
5. A : Sen san-byaku!
6. B : Sen ro-ppyaku!
7. A : Ni-sen!
8. B : San-zen!
9. A : Ha-ssen!
10. A : Yatta!

HIRAGANA

1. A : ひゃく！
2. B : にひゃく！
3. A : ごひゃく！
4. B : せん！
5. A : せんさんびゃく！
6. B : せんろっぴゃく！
7. A : にぜん！
8. B : さんぜん！
9. A : はっせん！
10. A : やった！

VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English	Class
五百	ごひゃく	go-hyaku	five hundreds	numeral
百	ひゃく	hyaku	hundred	numeral
三千	さんぜん	san-zen	three thousand	numeral
十万	じゅうまん	jū-man	one hundred thousand	numeral
二千	にせん	ni-sen	two thousand	numeral
千	せん	sen	thousand	numeral
一万	いちまん	ichi-man	ten thousand	numeral
二百	にひゃく	ni-hyaku	two hundred	numeral

SAMPLE SENTENCES

<p>百円玉がありますか。</p> <p><i>Hyaku-en dama ga arimasu ka.</i></p> <p>Do you have a one-hundred-yen coin?</p>	<p>この靴は一万円です。</p> <p><i>Kono kutsu wa ichi-man-en desu.</i></p> <p>This pair of shoes is ten thousand yen.</p>
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GRAMMAR

Basic Bootcamp #5: Counting II

The Focus of This Lesson is to Teach Numbers from 100 to 100,000 in Japanese

Let's take a look at the numbers from 100 to 100,000 in Japanese.

Dialog

Setting: Hiro and Kazuki are at an auction, where an antique comic book is being auctioned off.

Auctioneer: And here we have an antique comic book-this is a true collector's item that's one of a kind! We'll start the bidding at 100 yen.

Hiro: *Hyaku!* (100!)

Kazuki: *Ni-hyaku!* (200!)

Hiro: *Go-hyaku!* (500!)

Kazuki: *Sen!* (1,000!)

Hiro: *Sen san-byaku!* (1,300!)

Kazuki: *Sen ro-ppyaku!* (1,600!)

Hiro: *Ni-sen!* (2,000!)

Kazuki: *San-zen!* (3,000!)

Hiro: *Ha-ssen!* (8,000!!!)

Kazuki:

Auctioneer: Sold! To this person right here for 8,000 yen!

Hiro: *Yatta!* (Yay!)

Vocabulary and Lesson Notes

百

hyaku

100

千

sen

1,000

一万

ichi-man

10,000

To create multiples of hundreds and thousands, attach the number before the word *hyaku* ("hundred") and *sen* ("thousand").

100	<i>hyaku</i>	百	1,000	<i>sen</i>	千
200	<i>ni-hyaku</i>	二百	2,000	<i>ni-sen</i>	二千
300	<i>san-byaku*</i>	三百	3,000	<i>san-zen*</i>	三千
400	<i>yon-hyaku</i>	四百	4,000	<i>yon-sen</i>	四千
500	<i>go-hyaku</i>	五百	5,000	<i>go-sen</i>	五千
600	<i>ro-ppyaku*</i>	六百	6,000	<i>roku-sen</i>	六千
700	<i>nana-hyaku</i>	七百	7,000	<i>nana-sen</i>	七千
800	<i>ha-ppyaku*</i>	八百	8,000	<i>ha-ssen</i>	八千
900	<i>kyū-haku</i>	九百	9,000	<i>kyū-sen</i>	九千

*The words marked with an asterisk are exceptions. Please note the sound changes that take place in these words.

10,000	<i>ichi-man</i>	一万
20,000	<i>ni-man</i>	二万
30,000	<i>san-man</i>	三万
40,000	<i>yon-man</i>	四万
50,000	<i>go-man</i>	五万
60,000	<i>roku-man</i>	六万
70,000	<i>nana-man</i>	七万
80,000	<i>hachi-man</i>	八万
90,000	<i>kyū-man</i>	九万
100,000	<i>jū-man</i>	十万
1,000,000	<i>hyaku-man</i>	百万

More Complex Numbers

百十一

hyaku jū-ichi

111

四百七十

yon-hyaku nana-jū

470

六百二十一

roppyaku ni-jū-ichi

621

三千五百九十

san-zen go-hyaku kyū-jū

3,590

七千八百八十

nana-sen ha-ppyaku hachi-jū

7,880

LESSON NOTES

All About #1

Introduction to Japanese and Top 5 Reasons to Study

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2 Grammar

1

GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is The Top Five Reasons to Learn Japanese

Background of the Japanese Language

Japanese is thought to be an isolated language or an Altaic language. It ranks in the list of the top ten languages based on number of native speakers, with around 130 million people speaking Japanese as their native language.

The Japanese language is rich with regional dialects, with some being so radically different from *hyōjun-go* (標準語), the "standard dialect," that even some native speakers have trouble understanding them. The most well known dialect is *Kansai-ben* (関西弁) the "Kansai dialect," which is spoken throughout the Kansai region of Japan. The Kansai region refers to an area in western Japan that includes the major cities of Osaka and Kyoto.

The Japanese written language consists of three alphabets: *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*. *Hiragana* and *katakana* are phonetic alphabets, with the latter being used primarily for writing foreign words. *Kanji* is a system of characters of Chinese origin used to represent various ideas.

As mentioned above, the Japanese language's writing system has borrowed heavily from that of the Chinese language. Although the number of borrowed Chinese characters is in the thousands, many of them have fallen out of use. The Japanese Ministry of Education has created a list of 1,945 *jōyō kanji* (常用漢字) "common use kanji" made up of characters commonly used in everyday life. Japanese children will have studied all of these *kanji* by the time they graduate from junior high school.

About Japan

Japan is known as *Nihon* or *Nippon* (日本) to the Japanese, with the two characters meaning "sun" and "origin." This is why Japan is sometimes known as the "Land of the Rising Sun."

Where Is Japanese Spoken?

Japanese is mainly spoken on the island of Japan, but there are large communities of Japanese speakers all over the world, including China, Korea, Australia, the United States, Canada, and many other regions.

Why Is It Important?

So why should you learn Japanese? Here are some of the top reasons...

5. To communicate with Japanese people! Over 130 million people throughout the world speak Japanese, placing it in the top ten languages spoken in the world. Just imagine all

of the conversations you could have!

- 4.** Japanese pronunciation is easy! Japanese is pronounced just the way it looks, so you can start speaking it right away.
- 3.** You will learn more than just a language. Learning Japanese will give you a great insight into the world of Japanese culture that you just can't get any other way. By learning how the language works, you'll learn more about how the culture works.
- 2.** Japanese is fun! Japan has a lot to offer in the way of pop culture-fun and interesting movies, music, TV shows, comics, games-you name it! Learning Japanese will give you even greater access to the rich world of Japanese pop culture.
- 1.** Learning Japanese makes you smarter! Recent scientific studies show that learning a second language can actually hold off Alzheimer's disease. Learning a second language also increases your memory and makes you stay sharper, helps your attention span, and sharpens your critical thinking skills. What excuse is there NOT to study Japanese now?

LESSON NOTES

All About #2

Learn the Japanese Writing System

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Japanese Writing System

The Japanese writing system uses two syllabic scripts, known separately as *hiragana* (ひらがな) and *katakana* (カタカナ) and collectively as *kana* (かな), as well as thousands of Chinese characters known as *kanji* (漢字). Each script serves a different function. We use *hiragana* for grammatical elements and for words that do not use *kanji* (or for words where the author doesn't know the *kanji*). We most frequently use *katakana* to write borrowed words of foreign origin and onomatopoeic sound effects. Finally, we use *kanji* for words of both Japanese and Chinese origin as well as many Japanese names.

The earliest written form of Japanese was based on *kanji*. In this system, known as *man'yōgana*, these *kanji* were used for their pronunciation rather than their meaning. Because this system was quite complicated, *kana* were invented as a way to simplify it. As a result, each *hiragana* and *katakana* character comes from a simplified version of a *man'yōgana kanji*. If you look at some of these *man'yōgana kanji* and their simplified *kana* equivalents side-by-side, it is easy to see how they came to be.

There are forty-six characters in the *hiragana* and *katakana* scripts, for a total of ninety-two characters in all. These characters represent sounds, specifically syllables. A syllable is generally made up of a consonant plus a vowel, though some are only a vowel. In Japanese, there are five vowels (a, i, u, e, and o) and fourteen basic consonants (k, s, t, n, h, m, y, r, w, g, z, d, b, and p).

We use the *hiragana* syllabary for two types of words that do not use *kanji*: *okurigana* (送り仮名), which are inflected verb and adjective endings; and for grammatical elements called "particles." *Hiragana* is also used to write *furigana* (ふりがな), small symbols placed above or to the side of a *kanji* character that indicate how it is read. While *furigana* is most frequently used to aid children and foreigners learning Japanese, it is also used when the reading for a *kanji* is particularly difficult or uncommon. *Hiragana* are characterized by their curvy, flowing lines.

We use the *katakana* syllabary for *gairaigo* (外来語), words of foreign origin, onomatopoeic words that indicate sounds, scientific names, and also for emphasis, much like how italics are used in English. *Katakana* are characterized by their angular, boxy lines.

Kanji are Chinese characters that have been adapted into Japanese over many years. The characters were originally pictographs of people, animals, and other objects.

Kanji	Reading	"Meaning"
口	<i>kuchi</i>	"mouth"
山	<i>yama</i>	"mountain"

As you can see in the table above, the character 口, pronounced *kuchi*, means "mouth"

and is a box shape that resembles an open mouth. Another example is the character 山, pronounced *yama*, which means "mountain" and indeed looks like the skeleton of a mountain. However, over the centuries, *kanji* have become increasingly stylized and most no longer resemble the things they represent. *Kanji* are made up of smaller parts known as radicals. Many characters have been combined with others to create new ones. When written on the page, each character is given exactly the same amount of space, no matter how complex it is. In written Japanese, there are no spaces between characters.

The number of *kanji* in existence number into the tens of thousands, but the good news is that a large number of these are rarely used variants, accumulated throughout history. The Japanese government has created a list of characters recommended for daily use known as *jōyō kanji* (常用漢字), which currently contains 1,945 characters (as of 2009). As this list occasionally undergoes revisions, this number may increase in the future. Studies have shown that full literacy in the Japanese language requires knowledge of around two thousand characters.

Most *kanji* have at least two different kinds of readings: *kun yomi* (訓読み), which is the Japanese reading, and *on yomi* (音読み), which is the original Chinese reading. To give an example, we can read the *kanji* 水 ("water") as either *mizu* (*kun yomi*) or *sui* (*on yomi*). We usually use the *kun yomi* when the *kanji* stands alone and the *on yomi* when the *kanji* is part of a compound. However, there are exceptions to this rule you simply must remember.

Rōmaji (ローマ字) is Japanese transliterated into the Roman alphabet. With *rōmaji*, one can read Japanese without any prior knowledge of the Japanese writing system. There are several systems of *rōmaji*, with the Hepburn system being the most widely used.

LESSON NOTES

All About #3

Learn Japanese Grammar

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2 Grammar

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is Basic Japanese Grammar

Welcome to our explanation of Basic Japanese Grammar! Now, we know the mere mention of grammar is enough to make your palms sweat and perhaps bring back some not-so-good memories of your old high school language classes. But don't worry—we're here to give you a basic overview of Japanese grammar using language that's easy to understand—no drawn-out, long-winded explanations here! Learn Japanese grammar quickly while having fun at the same time!

Before we take a look at Japanese grammar, let's quickly review the basics of English grammar. By understanding more about how English grammar works, you'll be able to see how it differs from Japanese grammar.

First, let's take a look at sentence order.

English is what we call an SVO language, which means the sentences come in the order of subject-verb-object. Let's illustrate this with an example.

English Sentence Order

Subject	Verb	Object
I	eat	fruit

The subject, or the thing taking the action, is "I." The verb, or action, is "eat." The object, or the thing receiving the action, is "fruit." This is an example of a sentence in an SVO language.

Japanese is a bit different from English in this respect. Japanese is what's called an SOV language. This means the subject comes first, followed by the object, and then the verb. Remember that: the verb comes last. So our previous example, "I eat fruit" in English, becomes "I fruit eat" when put in Japanese SOV order.

Japanese Sentence Order

Subject	Object	Verb
I	fruit	eat

This is one of the biggest differences between English and Japanese grammar and one of the most important aspects to keep in mind!

Characteristics of the Japanese Language

Now let's compare some characteristics of the Japanese language with the English language. First, we'll talk about features that are much simpler than their English counterparts.

Tense

Let's start with tense. Tense is a method we use in English to refer to time—past, present, and future. If you are a native English speaker, you might not even be aware of how many

tenses there are in English. Let's think about the future tense for a moment. The present-tense sentence "I jog", when changed to the future tense, becomes "I will jog" or even "I'm going to jog". (And there's even a slight difference between them!)

Japanese, on the other hand, only has two tenses: past and non-past. It's called non-past because Japanese uses the same tense for the present and future. How does this work? Let's take a look! Here's an example of our sentence in the present tense.

(スーパーに行きます。)

Sūpā ni ikimasu.

"I go to the supermarket."

So how do we change this to the future tense? Simple! We just add a word that indicates the action will occur sometime in the future:

[(明日/来週) スーパーに行きます。]

raishū Sūpā ni ikimasu.

"I will go to the supermarket tomorrow/next week."

There you have it! By adding a word like "tomorrow" or "next week" that indicates some point in the future, we've turned our present tense into future tense without even changing the verb.

Conjugation

English is full of irregular verbs. In many cases, we can turn present tense verbs into past tense by adding the suffix -ed to the end, but think of how many exceptions there are to this rule: "fly" becomes "flew," "run" becomes "ran," "buy" becomes "bought"...the list goes on! If you've ever studied a Romance language, then you know how common exceptions are when it comes to conjugating verbs. In contrast, Japanese only has two-count them-two verbs that conjugate irregularly. The rest follow the same patterns, so they're easy to get the hang of! Japanese verbs are divided up into three different groups according to how they conjugate, which we will refer to as Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3 later on.

English and many other languages also conjugate verbs according to who is taking the action: for example, "I go" vs. "he goes." When you get into Romance languages, this system gets even more complex. However, in Japanese, it doesn't matter who is doing the action-the verb will not change! Let's look at a few examples so we can really appreciate this advantage of Japanese. First, note that the verb "to go" is *ikimasu*. The other words in red are "I", "him", and "you", respectively.

1. 私は学校に行きます。
Watashi wa gakkō ni ikimasu.
"I go to school."
2. 彼は学校に行きます。
Kare wa gakkō ni ikimasu.
"He goes to school."
3. あなた達は学校に行きます。
Anata-tachi wa gakkō ni ikimasu.
"You (pl.) go to school."

Take a look at *ikimasu!* It doesn't change! Who is doing the action has no effect on the following verb. Great, isn't it?

Singulars and Plurals

Remember learning all of the complicated rules for forming plurals in English when you were in grade school? We first learn that you add the suffix *-s* to a word to make it plural, but then came one exception after another, such as words like *knives*, *candies*, and *mice*. Well now, think about this: Japanese words almost never change to reflect plurals. *Nezumi*, the word for "mouse," could refer to one mouse or ten mice! What a big change from having two different words to differentiate between singular and plural.

Forming Questions

Think for a moment about how you form questions in English. You have to change the order of the sentence. Here's an example:

"**He is** a student" becomes "**Is he** a student?"

In Japanese, it's extremely easy to create questions. By simply putting *ka* at the end of a sentence, you can turn it into a question! Let's take a look at the Japanese equivalent of the sentence above:

彼は学生です。 → 彼は学生ですか？

(*Kare wa gakusei desu.*) → (*Kare wa gakusei desu ka?*)

"He is a student." → "Is he a student?"

Let's look at one more:

あなたは東京に住んでいます。 → あなたは東京に住んでいますか。

(*Anata wa Tōkyō ni sunde imasu.*) → (*Anata wa Tōkyō ni sunde imasu ka?*)

"You live in Tokyo." → "Do you live in Tokyo?"

Okay, now let's take a look at some characteristics unique to the Japanese language that may not have any equivalent in English.

Formal and Informal Speech

In English, we can use certain words and phrases to make our speech sound more polite to others. Japanese uses entirely different grammar structures when it comes to polite speech. There are three politeness levels in spoken Japanese: informal, formal, and honorific.

Gender

By gender, we do not mean feminine and masculine words that show up in many of the romance languages. By gender, we mean that female speakers will use different words and phrases than men, and that there are some exclusively masculine words. In Japanese, it is very possible to look at written dialogue and guess whether the speaker is male or female without any verbal cues.

Counters

Japanese has a long list of counters, or words that we use to count specific items. The corresponding counter depends on the appearance or makeup of the item. For example, there are different counters for sheets of paper and bottles because they differ in shape. While English does contain some counters (think "loaf of bread" or "bottle of wine"), the range of counters in Japanese is much more extensive.

Omission

In English, we almost always need to state the subject in our sentences: "Yesterday **I** went

shopping at the mall, and then I went to Starbucks where I had a latte." Note that we *need* to state "I" for every action.

In Japanese, the writer often omits the subject from the sentence when it's understood who is doing the action. In fact, stating the subject every time will actually make your Japanese sound unnatural. The key is to only state the subject when it's absolutely necessary. In this way, Japanese lets you get straight to the important part of your sentence!

That wasn't so bad, was it? We hope this overview has given you a good idea of some of the most unique characteristics of Japanese. Keeping these in mind will give you an idea of what to look out for and will prepare you as you dive further into the world of Japanese grammar!

LESSON NOTES

All About #4

Learn Japanese Pronunciation

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is Basic Japanese Pronunciation

It's often said that Japanese pronunciation is one of the easiest aspects of the language. And guess what-it's true! But it still takes some practice, and we're here to help you with it. We'll introduce you to the ins and outs of Japanese pronunciation and show you how it differs from English pronunciation.

Sounds and Syllables

Let's first take a look at how Japanese sounds work. Compared with other languages, Japanese has a relatively small set of sounds, with only fourteen consonants (k, s, t, n, h, m, y, r, w, g, z, d, b, and p) and five vowels (a, e, i, o, and u). In Japanese, there are no such words as the English word "strength," which has clusters of three or more consonants. Japanese is made up of syllables, which are made up of a consonant and a vowel. The only exceptions are the vowels and the *n* sound, which stand alone.

Stress

Let's think about stress in English for a moment. Try saying the words "important" and "interesting" aloud. When you say these words aloud, you're putting emphasis, or stress, on a certain syllable. In "important," the stress is on the "port" syllable. In "interesting," the stress is on the "int" syllable. If you haven't studied phonetics before, it's probably something that just comes naturally that you've never noticed! Because correct English pronunciation emphasizes certain syllables, English is known as a stress language.

Japanese, on the other hand, doesn't have stress! It's a stress-free language! (Until you start learning kanji, perhaps...) In Japanese, each syllable is held the same length of time and given equal stress. Stressing only certain syllables will sound unnatural; so keep this in mind when pronouncing Japanese.

Let's take a look at a word in Japanese and compare how it is pronounced in both Japanese and English. Let's take the word *teriyaki*, the name of a cooking technique where meat is marinated.

English pronunciation: [ter-uh-**YAH**-kee] Note how the third syllable is stressed.

Japanese pronunciation: [teh-ree-yah-kee] In Japanese, each syllable receives the same amount of stress.

This might sound like a lot to consider, but remember that learning good pronunciation is one of the easier aspects of learning the Japanese language!

LESSON NOTES

All About #5

Top 5 Must Know Japanese Phrases

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Top Five Must-Know Japanese Phrases

Here we'll introduce five phrases in Japanese that will take you a long way and help you out in a variety of situations!

Sumimasen (すみません) "Excuse me" / "I'm sorry" / "Thanks"

Sumimasen is a versatile phrase with a few different meanings depending on the situation, the closest of which is "excuse me." Whether you are trying to get someone's attention to ask them a question, making your way through a crowded area, or apologizing for running into someone or stepping on their foot, *sumimasen* is the phrase you want to use. If someone gets something for you or kindly does something for you, you can use *sumimasen* to thank them as well as apologize for the trouble they have gone through to help you. The correct spelling and pronunciation of this phrase is *sumimasen*, but quite a few people pronounce it as *suimasen*, omitting the first "m" sound.

Dōmo (どうも) "Thanks" / "Hi"

Dōmo is a simple and easy way to say "thank you" as well as greet someone. This phrase is more casual than using *kon'nichi wa* ("hello") or *arigatō* ("thank you"), and you can use it when these two phrases might be a little too formal for what the situation calls for. Some people use this to thank shop clerks because they think that using the formal *arigatō gozaimasu* ("thank you very much") might be a little too polite and out of place.

Dōzo (どうぞ) "Please go ahead" / "Please"

If you're offering something to someone or would like someone to go ahead of you or do something before you, *dōzo* is the phrase you are looking for. Offering your seat to someone on the train? *Dōzo*. Holding the door for someone and would like them to go right ahead? *Dōzo*. At a restaurant and someone else's food came before yours and you would like them to start eating? *Dōzo*. Try your hand at making some delicious *o-nigiri* ("rice balls") and would like to offer them to someone? *Dōzo!*

O-negai shimasu (お願いします) "Please"

You can use this handy phrase when you would like to ask for a favor or make a request of some kind. By using this phrase, you can show your appreciation in advance for the favor or request you have asked. In a business situation, it means something like "please take care of this for me." In addition to requests or favors, you can also use it to ask for tangible objects.

Hai (はい) "Right" / "Yes" / "Here you go"

And now for the most compact phrase of the top five: the phrase *hai*. The most common translation for this word is "yes" or "right," but depending on the situation, it can also mean "here you go" if someone says it as they hand something to you. Something important to note, though, is that Japanese people often use this phrase as they are listening to show they are following what the speaker is saying - it doesn't necessarily mean they agree with or are affirming anything the speaker is saying. Just something to keep in mind to hopefully avoid any confusion!

You can also use this word when you aren't able to catch what someone is saying and you

would like them to repeat what they have said. When said with rising intonation, like a question (*hai?*), it is the equivalent of saying, "Excuse me?" or "I'm sorry?"

LESSON NOTES

All About #6

Think You Can Answer These 5 Questions About Japan?

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is Asking: How Much do you Really Know About Japan?

Test your knowledge of Japan with this fun quiz!

This lesson will test your basic knowledge of Japan by quizzing you on five areas of knowledge: geography, pop culture, travel, economics, and myth-busting.

Questions

1) Geography Question: How many prefectures does Japan have?

- A) 50
- B) 38
- C) 47

2) Pop Culture Question: Below are the names of three popular characters that originated in Japan. Can you put them in order of their creation, from oldest to newest?

Godzilla
Pikachu
Hello Kitty

3) Travel Question: The following are popular tourist sites in Japan. Which one is not located in Tokyo?

- A) Tsukiji fish market
- B) Mt. Fuji
- C) The Imperial Palace

4) Economic Question: Where does Japan's economy fall in the ranking of world economies?

5) Debunking a Myth About Japan Question: True/False: Japan's main staple diet is sushi.

Answers

1) Geography Question: How many prefectures does Japan have?

The answer is C) 47. Japan has forty-seven prefectures, the largest of which is the northernmost prefecture, Hokkaido, and the most populous of which is the country's capital, Tokyo.

2) Pop Culture Question: Below are the names of three popular characters that originated in Japan. Can you put them in order of their creation, from oldest to newest?

Answer: The correct order is Godzilla (1954), Hello Kitty (1974), and Pikachu (1995). All three characters have accumulated a large fan following not only in Japan but also around the world.

3) Travel Question: The following are popular tourist sites in Japan. Which one is not located in Tokyo?

The answer is B) Mt. Fuji. While Mt. Fuji is visible from Tokyo on a clear day, it is actually located 100 km/60 miles away, on the border of Shizuoka and Yamanashi prefectures.

4) Economic Question: Where does Japan's economy fall in the rankings of world economies?

The answer is #2. Japan's economy is the second largest in the world after that of the United States.

5) Debunking a Myth About Japan Question: True/False: Japan's main staple diet is sushi.

The answer is false! Many people think of sushi when they think of Japanese food, but the truth is that this food is more of a delicacy than anything else. You won't find many people who eat sushi every day or even on a regular basis. The main staple food in Japan is rice, which the Japanese eat with almost every meal.

LESSON NOTES

All About #7

Top 5 Japanese Dishes You Have to Try and Top 5 Dishes for the Really Brave!

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is Japanese Food

What comes to your mind when you think of Japanese food? Sushi, perhaps? Rolls containing various kinds of seafood and vegetables stuffed inside? Well, while you might find lots of sushi and rolls in Japan, they are merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Japanese cuisine - there is a whole lot more for you to discover!

Table Etiquette

Before we go on to the food, let's first talk about Japanese table etiquette. Before eating, it is customary to say *itadakimasu*, which means, "I will humbly receive," as a way to show gratitude for the meal.

When using chopsticks, it is important to remember a few things to avoid being rude. Don't stab your chopsticks into your rice and leave them there, and never pass food with your chopsticks directly to someone else's chopsticks, as both of these actions are related to funeral traditions.

When eating and drinking in a big group, wait for others to pour your drink for you, and then return the favor when you see someone's glass getting low.

In some Asian countries, such as Korea, it is unacceptable to pick up your rice bowl when eating, but in Japan, this is very common.

Regional Dishes

One of the most interesting aspects of Japanese cuisine is its vast array of regional delicacies. Each area of Japan boasts its own selection of specialty dishes that have become closely associated with that area. It is not uncommon for Japanese people from all over Japan to travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to try the different specialties in the place that they originally come from.

One of the most famous examples of regional cuisine is ***okonomiyaki***, which is a flat, pancake-shaped food. Cooked on a hot plate, *okonomiyaki* usually contains chopped cabbage, meat, and seafood. However, because the name contains the word *okonomi*, meaning "to one's liking," it is up to you to decide what goes into your *okonomiyaki*. Cheese, *mochi*, and even Korean kimchee ("pickled vegetables") are among some of the most popular additions to *okonomiyaki*. There are two regional variations of *okonomiyaki*: Osaka style and Hiroshima style. In Osaka style, which is considered the dominant style that you'll find all over Japan, the chef mixes all the ingredients together before transferring them to the hot plate. There, the chef cooks it and then tops it with dried seaweed, dried *bonito*, or fish flakes, and a thick *okonomiyaki* sauce. On the other hand, in Hiroshima style, the chef layers the ingredients one-by-one instead of mixing them together. It is very common to add noodles, and the amount of cabbage is anywhere from three to four times the amount usually used in Osaka-style *okonomiyaki*.

Other popular regional dishes include ***gōya chanpuru***, a stir-fried dish containing *gōya*, a very bitter gourd, from Okinawa; ***wanko soba***, buckwheat noodles from Iwate served in bite-served portions that keep coming until you say stop; ***basashi***, raw horse meat, from Kumamoto; ***gyūtan***, cow tongue, from Miyagi, and much, much more. If you have a chance to visit Japan, definitely try some of the local specialties!

Popular Dishes

Some of the most popular dishes in Japan are usually quite different from what people might imagine. If you were to look at the average Japanese person's lunch, what would you find? The most common Japanese lunch is the **bentō**. *Bentō* refers to a meal served in a box that is either prepared at home or bought at restaurants and convenience stores. Anything goes when it comes to the contents of a *bentō*, although white rice, fish, and vegetables are common elements found in many *bentō*. Visually, *bentō* range from very simple to elaborately arranged. There is even a kind of *bentō* called *kyaraben*, short for character *bentō*, where the food is arranged and decorated to look like people, animals, popular characters, and so on.

Other everyday Japanese foods include **o-nigiri**, rice balls wrapped in seaweed with various fillings; **curry**, usually containing potatoes, carrots, onions, and served together with white rice; **karaage**, Japanese-style fried meat, usually chicken; **rāmen**, a Japanese noodle dish that originated in China; and more.

Seasonal Dishes

The Japanese really love their seasons, and they especially love eating the different dishes associated with each season. When the cold weather sets in in the winter, people line up to eat **nabe** and **oden**, which are both hot stew-like dishes. *Nabe* is a hot pot that consists of a stew with assorted meats and vegetables. The host usually places the pot in the center of the table so many people can share it. *Oden*, on the other hand, is an assortment of vegetables and meat stewed in a light, soy-flavored broth. Common ingredients found in *oden* are *daikon* radish, boiled eggs, meat skewers, and fish cakes. You can purchase even *oden* at convenience stores, where you can pick and choose what goes into your *oden*.

In spring, along with the *sakura* ("cherry blossoms"), comes *sakura no shiozuke* ("salted cherry blossoms") and leaves that chefs use in various ways in Japanese cuisine, the most commonplace being **sakura-mochi**. *Sakura-mochi* is *mochi*, a sticky rice cake, wrapped in a salted *sakura* leaf and topped with a salted cherry blossom. The sweltering heat in the summer accounts for the popularity of cold dishes such as *hiyashi sōmen*, ("chilled wheat noodles"), and **kakigōri**, ("shaved ice"). In fall, *kuri*, known as chestnuts, come into season and chefs use them in many dishes, such as *kuri go-han*, which is cooked rice with sweet chestnuts.

Top Five Foods to Try in Japan

Sushi

Sushi is probably the most famous Japanese food. Make your way to Tsukiji Fish Market, one of the largest fish markets in the world, for some of the freshest *sushi* around. For a unique *sushi* experience, try *kaiten zushi*, which also known as conveyor belt *sushi*. In *kaiten zushi* restaurants, the chefs place plates of *sushi* on a rotating conveyor belt that makes its way through the restaurant, moving past every table and seat. Customers are free to pick and choose the *sushi* they want off the conveyor belt, although they can also place special orders.

Soba and udon

Soba, buckwheat noodles, and *udon*, thick noodles made from wheat, are two of the

most popular types of Japanese noodles. You can serve both hot or cold, and there are many different varieties in different regions of Japan.

Tōfu

Let's face it; tofu doesn't have the best reputation in the West. Even if you aren't crazy about tofu or just can't shake its bland, flavorless image, you're sure to find a *tōfu* recipe that will make you reconsider this Japanese delicacy. In Japan, there are innumerable ways to prepare tofu that give it tons of flavor. Some of the most popular include *agedashi-dōfu* ("deep-fried tofu"), *mabō dōfu* ("spicy tōfu," originally from China), and the aforementioned *gōya champuru*, a dish from Okinawa made with *gōya* and *tōfu*.

Shabushabu

Shabushabu is a dish that uses thin slices of meat dipped in boiling water or broth, which you then dip into a flavored sauce and eat. This dish is usually served with tōfu and vegetables.

Rāmen

Rāmen is a Japanese noodle dish that has its roots in China. It consists of a meaty broth, noodles, shredded meat, and vegetables. *Rāmen* shops are located all over Japan, with many regional variations available. Some of the most popular *rāmen* flavors are *miso* (a paste made from fermented soybeans), *shōyu* ("soy sauce"), *shio* ("salt"), and *tonkotsu* ("pork bone").

Top Five Foods for the Brave

Nattō

Nattō is a traditional food made from fermented soybeans, infamous for its bad smell and sticky consistency. So infamous, in fact, that one question Japanese people are sure to ask you is whether or not you have tried *nattō*. *Nattō* is usually eaten as a topping on rice.

Nama tamago

Nama tamago, or raw egg, shows up in a variety of Japanese dishes, including the popular favorites *sukiyaki*, where you dip meat into a bowl of raw egg before you eat it, and *tamago kake go-han*, cooked rice mixed with raw egg and a little bit of soy sauce.

Shiokara

Shiokara is Japanese fermented seafood that has a very strong flavor and is quite salty. It is definitely an acquired taste, even for many native Japanese people.

Reba-sashi

Reba-sashi is short for *rebā sashimi*, which is "raw liver." You can usually find this at *yakiniku* (Korean barbeque) restaurants in Japan.

Kusaya

Kusaya is a Japanese style salted-dried fish. The name comes from the word *kusai*, which literally means, "smells bad." You make *kusaya* by soaking fish into a "*kusaya* gravy" (that is used over and over again) and then leave it to dry in the sun. The smell of *kusaya* is very strong, but the taste is relatively mellow. While it is fairly well-known because of its bad smell, even among Japanese people, few have actually tried it.

LESSON NOTES

All About #8

Top 5 Things You Need to Know About Japanese Society

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is Japanese Society

Japanese society is a very broad topic and is hard to summarize in a single lesson. That's why we're narrowing it down to its top five most important aspects!

Major Cities of Japan

Tokyo is the capital of Japan and the largest city in the country. Tokyo is also one of Japan's forty-seven prefectures, but it is referred to as a *to* ("a metropolis") instead of a *ken* ("a prefecture"). The metropolis of Tokyo is made up of twenty-three *ku* ("city wards"), twenty-six cities, five towns, and eight villages, as well as numerous small Pacific islands.

The name Tokyo means "the Eastern Capital," and it became the capital of Japan during the nineteenth century when its name changed from Edo to Tokyo. As of 2007, the population of the city of Tokyo is estimated to be about 12.8 million people. The Greater Tokyo area, which is made up of Tokyo and surrounding prefectures Chiba, Kanagawa, and Saitama, has an estimated population of 35.6 million people. Because of the large number of people living in Tokyo, downtown Tokyo is often very crowded and busy, especially in and around major commuting areas like train stations.

Shinjuku, one of the twenty-three special wards of Tokyo, is a major commercial and administrative center, and most consider it the heart of downtown Tokyo. It is home to the busiest train station in the world, Shinjuku Station, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, the administration center for the government of Tokyo.

There is no shortage of things to do and see in Tokyo. From the numerous museums and famous zoo in Ueno to the fancy high-end stores and restaurants in Ginza to the throng of discount electronics stores in Akihabara, each neighborhood offers something different and unique. Whether you're visiting Tokyo as a tourist or making a life there, you're sure never to get bored.

Kyoto, one of the oldest cities in Japan, was the capital of Japan until 1868, when Tokyo became the capital. Now it is a major city in the Kansai area, known for its traditional atmosphere because of its numerous temples and shrines. Thousands of tourists come from all over the world to visit these temples and shrines, especially in spring to see the cherry blossoms and in autumn to see the leaves change color.

Osaka is a large city that is located in the Kansai area close to Kyoto. It is the capital of Osaka prefecture as well as the economic and cultural center of the Kansai region. People from Osaka are characterized as friendly with a good sense of humor. Many famous Japanese comedians hail from Osaka. Older women in Osaka especially are known for being bright and full of energy, as well as good at bargaining. Osaka also boasts regional specialties, among them *okonomiyaki*, a pancake-like dish containing a variety of ingredients cooked on a hot plate, and *takoyaki*, fried dumplings with small pieces of octopus inside.

Family Life

Families in Japan are generally traditional, and the family is a focal point of life.

Immediate families are a bit smaller compared to those of other countries; it is not uncommon for Japanese parents to have only one or two children. It was very common for three generations (children, parents, and grandparents) to live together in the same household; however, lately you can see a trend toward nuclear families in larger cities. It is also very common for adult children to continue to live with their parents well into their twenties or thirties until they get married. Japanese gender roles are still quite traditional, with women expected to stay home and take care of their children and men expected to support the family financially. However, this is also slowly changing, with the number of working mothers and stay-at-home dads slowly increasing.

A few problems have recently plagued Japanese family life and society. One of them is the decreasing birthrate, which hit a record low in 2005 when the number of deaths outnumbered the number of births. If this trend continues, Japan's population will start shrinking. Many factors are contributing to this problem, with the delay in marriage being one of the major ones. More and more men and women are waiting until they are older to get married, with the number of single people in their thirties and forties increasing steadily every year. Another problem is the lack of support and benefits for parents with children, which makes the decision to have children an undesirable one in the eyes of young people.

Work Culture and Economy

Japan's economy is ranked second in the world after that of the United States, and some of its main industries include motor vehicles, electronics, industrial and transportation equipment, and chemicals. Some major, well-known Japanese companies include Sony, Mitsubishi, Toyota, and Honda.

In Japan, the dominant work culture is quite rigid. Employees in their first years at a company often have to work long hours for little pay. Working overtime, which is often unpaid, is an everyday occurrence at Japanese companies. The hierarchy in Japanese companies is very strict as well, with relationships following a rigid system based on seniority. Companies require subordinates to address their superiors formally and treat them with respect. It is very common for employees to all go out drinking together after a long day at work; the Japanese see this as a way to strengthen relationships and build work camaraderie. There are some disadvantages to the seniority system, however. When managers promote employees, they focus more on age and the amount of the time the person has worked at the company rather than individual accomplishments and achievements.

Another important part of the Japanese work economy is the custom of lifelong employment. This system, however, is becoming less common due to a decrease in the number of full-time employees and an increase in the number of part-time and contractual employees. There is even a term, *freeter*, the Japanese have coined to refer to young people who work one or more part-time jobs as an alternative to obtaining full-time employment. *Freeters* cite a flexible schedule and the ability to take more time off with relative ease as advantages to working part-time jobs.

Politics

Japan is a parliamentary monarchy governed by a Prime Minister and his cabinet. The

bicameral parliament is called the Diet and is made up of the upper House of Councillors and the lower House of Representatives. The lower House holds most of the power. The Japanese people elect members of the Japanese Diet, who in turn elect the Prime Minister of Japan. Japan has a figurehead Emperor whose role is mostly symbolic and traditional; he possesses no political power.

Unlike the United States or the United Kingdom, Japanese political parties tend to change constantly with one major exception—the Liberal Democratic Party, which has held power for more than fifty years—since the end of World War II. The second and third most popular parties at the moment are the *Kōmeitō*, the Clean Government Party (CGP), and the newly founded *Minshutō*, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Generational Trends

Generally speaking, the older and younger generations tend to do things differently and hold different ideas about things. The older generation tends to have a strong sense of loyalty to their companies and place work high on their priority lists, even above family. The younger generation, however, is not averse to changing jobs if there is something they are dissatisfied with, and as mentioned before, many see no problem with not pursuing full-time employment. Members of the younger generation also seem to keep more of their own interests in mind as they wait longer and longer to get married and have children. Many members of the older generation view these trends of young people today as signs that they are selfish and fickle. As attitudes continue to change, it will be interesting to see in what ways Japanese culture and society change along with them.

LESSON NOTES

All About #9

Top 5 Important Dates in Japan

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Five Most Important Holidays in Japan

Japan has many different holidays that carry a lot of meaning and have years of tradition behind them. Here we'll introduce the top five most important holidays in Japan, going in reverse order starting with number five.

The fifth most important holiday in Japan is *Seijin no Hi*, or "**Coming-of-Age Day**." On this day, people who turn twenty during the current school year, which runs between April until the following March, celebrate their coming of age. In Japan, when people turn twenty, society legally recognizes them as an adult, and they are able to drink alcohol and vote. The festival was created as a Japanese national holiday in 1947 when it was set to January 15th. However, this holiday was moved to the second Monday in January in 1999 as a result of the "Happy Monday System," the Japanese government's decision to move more holidays to Monday to create a three-day weekend for those who normally have a five-day workweek.

On this day, local city halls and community centers hold small ceremonies in the morning. Government officials give speeches and hand out small gifts to the people in attendance who are turning twenty. It is customary for girls to wear *furisode kimono*, which are kimono that have sleeves much longer than those of regular *kimono*, and put their hair up in fancy hairstyles. Because the *furisode kimono* are very elaborate and hard to put on, many girls go to a beauty salon to get professional help with their *kimono* and hair. On this day, most men wear fancy suits, although you will sometimes see men wearing dark-colored *kimono*. Families with someone who is turning twenty will often cook and eat red bean rice, known as *sekihan*.

The fourth most important holiday (or in this case, group of holidays) in Japan is **Golden Week**. Golden Week refers to the period in late April and early May that contains many Japanese national holidays grouped closely together.

The first holiday of Golden Week falls on April 29th and is called *Shōwa no Hi* (昭和の日) "Showa Day," which was the birthday of the former emperor Showa. The second holiday is *Kenpō Kinenbi* (憲法記念日), or "Constitution Memorial Day," which is held on May 3rd. The new Japanese constitution went into effect in 1947 on this day. Next comes *Midori no Hi* (みどりの日), which is "Greenery Day" or "Nature Day" on May 4th, during which the Japanese celebrate nature. The last holiday during Golden Week is *Kodomo no Hi* (こどもの日), or "Children's Day," which falls on May 5th. On this day, parents pray for a happy and healthy life for their children.

Many Japanese people will take paid time off on the intervening workdays, but it is not uncommon for some companies to close down completely and give their employees the entire week (and sometimes more) off. During this time, many people take a vacation and travel around the country or go abroad. As a result, airports and train stations become very crowded, plane ticket fees increase dramatically, and accommodation reservations become very hard to get, even in advance.

The third most important holiday in Japan is **O-bon**. *O-bon* is a Buddhist event where people pray for the repose of their ancestors' souls and remember the deceased. If you

are familiar with Mexico's Day of the Dead festival, *O-bon* is quite similar. *O-bon* takes place from the 13th to the 16th of August (celebrated from July 13-15 in some areas). During this time, Japanese people return to ancestral family places, and visit and clean their ancestors' graves. The Japanese believe that during this time, the ancestors' spirits return to this world to visit their relatives.

Traditionally, the Japanese perform *o-bon* dances, known as *bon odori*, visit graves, and make food offerings at house altars and temples. *Bon odori* is the most common custom during *O-bon*. People wearing *yukata* (a light kimono worn in summer) go to the neighborhood *bon odori* and dance around a stage. When *O-bon* comes to an end, floating lanterns (known as *tōrō nagashi*) are put into rivers, lakes, and seas to guide the spirits back to their world.

The exact customs of *O-bon* vary widely from region to region throughout Japan. One of the most famous *O-bon* traditions takes place in Kyoto and is known as *Gozan no Okuribi* or *Daimonji no Okuribi*. On the night of August 16th, at the end of the festival, fires are lit on the five mountains that surround Kyoto to send the visiting spirits back to the netherworld. The Japanese light Chinese characters and Buddhist-related markings etched into the side of the mountains on fire in this amazing display that marks the end of *O-bon*.

The second most important holiday in Japan is **Ōmisoka**, which is New Year's Eve. This day is very symbolic in Japan as it is the last day of the year and the day before New Year's Day, the most important day of the year. **Ōmisoka** is usually accompanied by a big cleaning known as **Ōsōji** (大掃除), which literally means "big cleaning," and is comparable to the concept of "spring cleaning." Many Japanese people use this opportunity to clear out clutter from the old year and tidy up their homes and offices for the start of the new year.

For dinner on **Ōmisoka**, many people like to have a bowl of *toshikoshi soba* (New Year's Eve Soba, a type of Japanese noodle). This tradition comes from the association of the long noodles with the wish of "living a long, healthy life."

Another popular event that takes place on **Ōmisoka** is the television show *Kōhaku Uta Gassen*, the "Red vs. White Singing Contest," which airs on public television station NHK and starts at 7:30 PM and goes until 11:45 PM. Popular singers and groups split into two teams, with women making up the red team and men making up the white team. A panel of judges casts votes to decide which team performed better, and the judges declare one side the winner at the end of the broadcast.

The most important holiday in Japan is **O-shōgatsu** (お正月) or **Gantan** (元旦), which is New Year's Day. Many people spend time with their families, and people who work or live far from their families often go back to their hometown for New Year's.

The time around New Year's Day is a time for many "firsts." It's customary to visit a shrine or temple for *hatsu-mōde*, the first shrine/temple visit of the year, although many people go at some point during the first week of the new year instead of on New Year's Day. Some people even go up to the mountains or drive to the coast so they can see the first sunrise of the New Year, known as *hatsu-hinode*. The first dream you have once the New Year starts is referred to as *hatsu-yume*, whose contents are traditionally said to foretell the dreamer's luck in the ensuing year.

Many different types of special foods are eaten on New Year's Day or on the surrounding days. The most famous is known as *O-sechi*, a variety of traditional Japanese New Year cuisine that has been around since the Heian Period (794-1185). Many families prepare their own *o-sechi* at home, but many families also buy pre-made *o-sechi* from a supermarket or a department store. Each dish in *o-sechi* has its own special meaning. Here are some examples:

1. *kinton* (金団), "sweet potato and chestnut," symbolizes wealth.
2. *kazunoko* (数の子), "salted herring roe," symbolizes a wish to have more children in the New Year. *kazu* (数) means "number" and *ko* (子) means "child."
3. *kuromame* (黒豆), "sweet black beans," symbolize a wish for health in the New Year. *Mame*, which means "bean," also has the meaning of "diligence" and "health."
4. *datemaki* (伊達巻), "a sweet omelet mixed with fish paste or mashed shrimp," symbolizes a wish for many auspicious days.
5. *tai* (鯛), "sea bream," symbolizes an auspicious event.
6. *kobumaki* (こぶまき), "rolled kelp with fish," symbolizes joy.
7. *tazukuri* (田作り), "small, dried sardines cooked in soy sauce," symbolize an abundant harvest.

While not a part of *o-sechi*, the Japanese also eat *o-zōni* (お雑煮), a soup containing mochi rice cakes, around New Year's. In the eastern part of Japan, the soup of *o-zōni* is usually clear, and in the western part of Japan, *miso* soup is more common.

On New Year's Day, there is a custom of parents and relatives giving money to their children. The money they give is known as *o-toshidama*, and in most cases, they place it in special little envelopes called *o-toshidama bukuro*. Another custom is the act of sending New Year's greeting postcards known as *nengajō*. This tradition is similar to the act of giving Christmas cards in the West, although *nengajō* have no religious significance. The Japanese often decorate *nengajō* with the present year's Chinese zodiac sign. The Chinese zodiac has a cycle of twelve years, each of which is represented by an animal. The post office stocks all of the *nengajō* mailed in late December and delivers them all at once on January 1st. Unlike Christmas cards, which can be mailed early, *nengajō* shouldn't arrive before New Year's Day.

LESSON NOTES

All About #10

Top 5 pop culture things/icons you need to know about Japan

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GRAMMAR

All About Japanese Pop Culture

Japan is a country rich in pop culture that has started to gain recognition and popularity throughout the world. As popular culture changes quickly and drastically, we focus this lesson on the most recent pop culture. Please keep in mind that we wrote this lesson in 2009.

Popular Music

You might be surprised to learn that Japan boasts the second largest music industry in the world after the United States. Pop music is especially popular in Japan, although you can find all sorts of music in Japan done by Japanese artists, including rock, rap, hip-hop, reggae, and more.

Two groups in Japan that have enjoyed long-standing success are **Dreams Come True** and **Southern All Stars**. Dreams Come True is a duo made up of a vocalist and a bassist that has been around for over twenty years and spawned dozens of hit songs. Southern All Stars is composed of five members, two of which are husband and wife. They have enjoyed success with numerous top-ten singles and sixteen number one albums.

When it comes to female pop acts, three big names come to mind: **Ayumi Hamasaki**, **Namie Amuro**, and **Hikaru Utada**. Ayumi Hamasaki broke into the Japanese music scene with million-selling albums in the late '90s and has remained a huge seller ever since. Her musical style as well as fashion style seem to change with every record she releases, and many view her as a fashion leader, with many young girls copying her style. Namie Amuro became popular around the same time in the '90s as Ayumi Hamasaki. Namie Amuro is known not only for her strong singing voice, but also for her fast, high-energy dance moves that she pulls off while singing. Hikaru Utada debuted in Japan in 1999 when she was fifteen years old. Raised in both Japan and the United States, Utada is bilingual in both English and Japanese, and she records songs in both languages. Her debut album, *First Love*, is the highest-selling album in Japanese history, selling over seven million copies in Japan alone.

When it comes to male pop acts, a majority of them come from a talent agency known as **Johnny's Entertainment**, which trains and promotes male idol groups in Japan. Members of groups that belong to Johnny's Entertainment are known for being able to not only sing but also dance and act, making them well-rounded performers. Among the most well-known groups are SMAP, V6, Arashi, and Kinki Kids, with SMAP being the most recognizable. All five members of SMAP have become huge celebrities in their own rights, hosting their own TV and radio shows, regularly appearing in advertisements, and acting in numerous television shows and movies.

Popular Movies

Both imported Hollywood movies and domestic Japanese movies enjoy great popularity in Japan. Hollywood blockbusters such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the *Harry Potter* series, and the *Spiderman* series drew millions of moviegoers to theaters around the country. Recently, however, the popularity of domestic Japanese movies has been on the rise, with the annual box-office revenue for domestic movies hitting an all-time high in 2008.

Of the top Japanese films of 2008, the highest-grossing title was the animation film *Gake no Ue no Ponyo* ("Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea"), which world-renowned animator Hayao Miyazaki directed. **Hayao Miyazaki** is very well-known not only in Japan but throughout the world for his collection of animated masterpieces he makes through his

production company Studio Ghibli. Some of his famous works include films such as *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*, which was the first anime film to win an Academy Award.

Popular Television

When it comes to Japanese television, some of the most popular genres are ones you won't often see abroad. This is especially true of the variety genre. **Variety shows**, true to their name, feature a variety of different content - cooking segments, comedy segments, skits, and quizzes are just some of what you'll find on a typical Japanese variety show. Variety shows often feature a large panel of currently popular celebrities and sometimes a studio audience.

Quiz shows that feature contestants (who are almost always celebrities) answering questions on numerous subjects, such as science, history, math, the Japanese language, pop culture, and so on, also enjoy great popularity. Reality shows that have experienced a surge in popularity in the West are almost nonexistent.

Japanese dramas are also very popular among Japanese people of all ages. Japanese dramas follow a quarter system, which means a majority of dramas only run for one season for an average of ten to twelve episodes. Unlike in the West, once a drama finishes its initial run, it ends for good. Exceptionally popular dramas may come back for a second season or more, but this is not common. Many current dramas running in Japan are adaptations of popular movies, comics, or animated shows. At the same time, foreign-made dramas enjoy their fair share of popularity. Television networks broadcast titles such as *24*, *Prison Break*, *Lost*, and *Heroes*, and they are widely available for rental at video stores around the country.

Popular Foreigners in Japan

There are many recognizable foreigners in Japan. Alongside the major movie stars and celebrities known all over the world are a handful of foreigners widely known in Japan yet virtually unknown in their home country.

One foreigner who has recently become a big hit in Japan goes by the name of **Jero**. His real name is Jerome White, Jr., and he is an African-American singer who was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He has gained popularity singing *enka*, a traditional type of pop music that is especially popular among older people. The unique combination of Jero's background and age (twenty-six at the time of his debut) and the traditional Japanese music that he sings has drawn a lot of attention from the Japanese public and media.

In recent years, Japan has experienced a boom in the popularity of Korean entertainment, known as *hanyū*. It all started with the wildly popular Korean drama *Fuyu no Sonata*, which aired on NHK, *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai*, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, in 2004. This drama started a Korean entertainment phenomenon and made big stars out of the two leading actors, **Bae Yong Joon** and **Choi Ji Woo**. This has led to an influx of Korean entertainers in Japan, such as chart-topping boy band **Tōhōshinki**, male solo artist **Ryu Siwon**, and many more.

Foreigners have also made an impact in the world of Japanese sports. Two notable examples in the sumo world are **Kotoōshu** (from Bulgaria) and **Asashōryū** (from Mongolia). Both have drawn a lot of attention as foreigners who participate in the traditional sport of sumo.

Popular Japanese Men/Women Abroad

Quite a few Japanese people have made a name for themselves abroad in the worlds of entertainment, literature, and fashion.

Actor **Ken Watanabe** became a recognized name after appearing alongside Tom Cruise in the 2003 war film *The Last Samurai*. Takeshi Kitano gained worldwide attention as a filmmaker with the extraordinary success *Hanabi*, a film that went on to win numerous international awards.

Author **Haruki Murakami** is one of the most recognized names when it comes to contemporary Japanese literature. His works have been translated into thirty-four languages, and his stories have earned him acclaim and several awards, including the Yomiuri Prize and the Franz Kafka Prize.

Issey Miyake is the most well-known Japanese designer in the world, and he is considered the first Asian designer to gain worldwide recognition. Born in Hiroshima in 1938, he established the Miyake Design Studio in 1970 and started showing his clothing lines at the Paris collections in 1973. He is known for his designs that combine textile designs of the East with production methods and modern technology of the West. Today, you can purchase Issey Miyake's designs all around the world.

Popular Sports Figures

Baseball is arguably the most popular sport in Japan. The United States introduced baseball, or *yakyū*, as the Japanese know it, during the early Meiji Period. One of the most popular names of the Japanese baseball world both in Japan and abroad is **Ichiro Suzuki**. Ichiro Suzuki joined the Seattle Mariners in 2000, a move that many watched with great interest, as he was the first Japanese position player to play regularly for a Major League Baseball team. Other familiar names in baseball include **Hideki Matsui**, who plays for the New York Yankees, and **Daisuke Matsuzaka**, who plays for the Boston Red Sox.

In the figure skating world, **Shizuka Arakawa** made headlines when she received a gold medal in the 2006 Winter Olympics, a first in the event for a Japanese skater. These days a lot of global attention is on **Mao Asada**, who currently ranks third in the world in the International Skating Union World Standings for women.

LESSON NOTES

All About #11

Top 5 Tools for Learning Japanese

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Grammar

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Top Five Tools for Learning Japanese

The focus of this lesson is to suggest the top five useful tools you can use to learn Japanese.

Some great tools to aid you in your Japanese studies include the following:

1. Rikaichan

Rikaichan is a popup dictionary extension for the Firefox Internet browser that translates Japanese into English, German, French, or Russian. With this extension installed, you can easily look up the meaning of Japanese words that show up on webpages by simply hovering the cursor over the word. A box will instantly pop up with the reading and definition of the word. Rikaichan is very easy to use and is a must when navigating Japanese webpages.

Link: Rikaichan website: <http://www.polarcloud.com/rikaichan/>

2. Rikaichan Kanji Dictionary

Rikaichan not only translates words, but also gives you detailed information on *kanji*. Hover the cursor over any *kanji*, whether it is part of a compound or by itself, and press the Shift or Enter key to toggle between the word, *kanji*, and name dictionaries. The *kanji* dictionary gives detailed information that include the *kanji's* meaning, all possible readings, radicals that make up the *kanji*, number of strokes, and more. This *kanji* dictionary is a part of the Rikaichan add-on mentioned above, so there's no need for a separate program.

Link: Rikaichan website: <http://www.polarcloud.com/rikaichan/>

3. Eijiro Dictionary

Eijiro is an English-Japanese/Japanese-English dictionary with an extensive database of translations and sample sentences. A group of professional translators put it together and continue to update it regularly. As a result, Eijiro contains a huge number of difficult and obscure terms, colloquial expressions, and technical terms. You can buy Eijiro online at the ALC Online Shop website in the form of a CD-R or a downloadable dictionary file, and a free online version of Eijiro is available through the SpaceALC Japanese website portal.

Links: ALC Online Shop: <http://shop.alc.co.jp/top/>

SpaceALC (free online version of Eijiro): <http://www.alc.co.jp/>

4. Anki

Anki is a flashcard program that lets you review vocabulary, *kanji*, or both! This program is based on a theory called spaced repetition, which means it presents the learner with flashcards at certain calculated intervals. This system is based on research that shows that when you repeat new material to learn it, the interval at which you repeat it makes a big difference. The flashcard system in Anki is very flexible and customizable, making it a great tool for learning and retaining vocabulary and *kanji*.

Link: Anki website: <http://ichi2.net/anki/index.html>

5. Lang-8

Lang-8 is a Social Networking Service (SNS) created for the purpose of language exchange and international communication. Once you register, which is free, you can write a journal entry in the language you are studying, and other users who are native speakers of that language can correct your entry. In turn, you can also correct the journal entries of those who are studying your native language. Many people studying Japanese use Lang-8 to have native speakers correct their journal entries written in Japanese. Even if you are just getting started with Japanese, this is a good way to practice reading and writing in Japanese as well as receive valuable feedback!

Link: Lang-8: <https://lang-8.com>

LESSON NOTES

All About #12

Top 5 Classroom Phrases in Japanese

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2 Grammar

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Top 5 Classroom Phrases in Japanese

In this lesson, we'll teach you the top five useful classroom phrases in Japanese, and then some!

1. "Please say it." / "Please repeat."

Itte kudasai (言ってください) means "please say it." As a variation, you might also hear *ripīto shite kudasai* (リピートしてください), which means "please repeat (after me)," when teachers want you to repeat exactly what they have said.

2. "Please look."

Mite kudasai (見てください) means "please look," and when an object comes before the phrase, it means "please look at (object). For example, *howaito bōdo, mite kudasai* (ホワイトボード、見てください) means "please look at the whiteboard".

3. "Please read."

Yonde kudasai (読んでください) means "please read."

You can expect to hear this phrase if a teacher wants you to practice reading some word, phrase, or passage. For example, *tekisuto, yonde kudasai* (テキスト、読んでください) means "please read your textbook".

4. "Please write it."

Kaite kudasai (書いてください) means "please write it."

Teachers may use this phrase when they want you to practice writing some *hiragana*, *katakana*, or even *kanji*!

5. "Do you understand?"

The most direct translation is *wakarimasu ka?* (わかりますか?).

Other variations Japanese teachers often use include *daijōbu desu ka?* (大丈夫ですか?) and *ii desu ka?* (いいですか?), which both literally translate to "Is it/everything okay?" Teachers often use these questions to confirm understanding. If teachers want to ask whether there are any questions, they might also ask *shitsumon arimasu ka?* (質問ありますか?), which means "Are there any questions?"

LESSON NOTES

All About #13

Top 5 Phrases Your Teacher Will Never Teach You

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2 Grammar

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Top Five Phrases Your Teacher Will Never Teach You

The focus of this lesson is teaching you some very common Japanese expressions you might not learn from a Japanese teacher.

1. *Sugoi* (すごい)

Sugoi is an adjective meaning "wow," "amazing," or "great." This word is commonly heard and is often used when one hears or sees something interesting or unusual.

2. *Baka* (バカ)

Baka is a noun meaning "idiot" or "fool." When used as *baka na* (バカな), it becomes an adjective meaning "stupid." This word can either be insulting or playful depending on how it is used. When used in a serious manner, it can come across as a strong insult, so it's better to exercise caution with this word. When used as a joke among friends, it can come off as playful.

3. *Uso* (うそ!)

Uso literally means "lie," but when used as an exclamation, it corresponds to "No way!" or "Really!?" in English. If someone says this in response to something you have said, don't worry—they're not calling you a liar, but rather expressing surprise or disbelief.

4. Words used by young people:

Chō (超)

Chō is a slangy adverb that usually comes before adjectives to emphasize them, making this word the equivalent of "very," "so," or "really." For example, *muzukashii* means "difficult," so *chō muzukashii* would mean "really difficult," or "so difficult."

Yabai (やばい)

Yabai is a very slangy word that has a few different meanings. When used as an exclamation (*yabai!*), it usually indicates that something is wrong and roughly means "oh no!" or "shoot!" When used to describe something, it can have both a good meaning and a bad meaning depending on the context. For example, *Kono eiga wa yabai!* ("This movie is *yabai!*") could either mean that the movie was great or that it was bad.

Maji (マジ)

Maji is similar to *chō* in that it often comes before adjectives to emphasize them. When used as *maji de?!* (マジで?!), it becomes an exclamation meaning "Really?!" or "Are you serious?!"

Sugē (すげー)

Sugē is a colloquial version of the above-mentioned *sugoi*. In young people's speech (and particularly in young male speech), the "-oi" and "-ai" word endings turn into an "eh" sound.

5. *Aizuchi*

Aizuchi are frequent interjections listeners make during a Japanese conversation that show the listener is paying attention to and understanding the speaker. Some common ones include:

Sō sō / Da yo ne~ (そうそう / だよね~)

"Yeah" or "I know~" (expressing agreement)

Un un (うん うん)

"Okay" or "Yeah". Sometimes used just to show that you are listening.

Hē (へえー)

"Whoa!" or "Oh!" This is often used to show that you are impressed or that you didn't know something.

LESSON NOTES

All About #14

Top 5 Tips for Avoiding Common Mistakes in Japanese

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The Focus of This Lesson is the Top Five Tips for Avoiding Common Mistakes in Japanese

In this lesson, we'll offer tips to help you overcome some common errors that learners of Japanese make.

Tip #1:

Don't Attach *-san* to Your Own Name!

One of the first things English speakers learn in Japanese is name suffixes used when addressing other people. The most common one is *-san*, which we attach to people's first or last names to show respect. We learn that someone whose last name is Tanaka is always referred to as Tanaka-san, someone whose last name is Saito becomes Saito-san, and so on.

In a classroom setting, teachers refer to students using *-san* as well, such as John-san, or Sarah-san. When it comes time to introduce themselves, it is common for students to slip up and refer to themselves with *-san* attached to their names. Because we use *-san* to show respect for others, you should never use it to refer to yourself.

Correct:

○ 私はジョンです。

(*Watashi wa John desu.*)

"I'm John."

Incorrect:

× 私はジョンさんです。

(*Watashi wa John-san desu.*)

Tip #2:

Watch Your Politeness Level!

One of the unique aspects of Japanese is the varying politeness levels that change according to a number of factors: age and status of the speaker and listener, the speaker's relationship with the listener, and so on. Learners of Japanese are generally taught the formal speech style first, followed by a more casual, informal speech style. It is important to remember to speak formally to one's teachers, elders, and anyone else who follows under the category of *senpai*, those who are of higher status. Learners who learn the informal speech style first, or who spend a lot of time speaking informally with friends, might have trouble switching back to formal speech.

Correct usage to a superior:

○ 昼ごはん、食べましたか？

(*Hiru go-han, tabemashita ka?*)

"Did you eat lunch?" (formal)

Incorrect usage to a superior:

× 昼ごはん、食べた？

(*Hiru go-han, tabeta?*)

"Did you eat lunch?" (informal)

Tip #3:

Watch Your Gender!

In the Japanese language, the speaker's gender plays an important role in determining word choice, tone of voice, and the types of expressions used. Non-native male speakers in particular should be careful about the kind of language and intonation they pick up from female teachers as well as female friends or girlfriends. We recommend that you listen to both males and females speak Japanese so you can grasp the subtle differences between male and female speech.

Tip #4:

Learn Your Long Vowels Now!

In Japanese, there is a big distinction between long vowels and short vowels. In fact, the distinction is so big that the length of a vowel can change the meaning of a word! Simply mistaking the length of a vowel can result in a misunderstanding, which is why it is important to pay attention to long vowels as you learn new Japanese vocabulary.

かど vs. カード

(*kado*) (*kaado*)

"corner" "card"

来てください vs. 聞いてください

(*Kite kudasai*) (*Kiite kudasai*)

"Please come" "Please listen"

Tip #5:

Watch Out for Similar Sounding Words!

Because there are a relatively small number of possible sounds in Japanese, many words are exactly the same or almost the same but with different meanings. As a beginner in Japanese, it can be easy to mix up similar sounding words.

Some infamous examples include:

kirei (きれい), meaning "pretty" vs. *kirai* (きらい), meaning "hated"

kawaii (かわいい), meaning "cute" vs. *kowai* (こわい), meaning "scary"

hiro (ひろい), meaning "spacious" vs. *hidoi* (ひどい), meaning "terrible"

LESSON NOTES

All About #15

The Best Japanese Phrases - Learn Your Japanese Teacher's Favorite Phrases

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is The Best Japanese Phrases - Learn Your Japanese Teacher's Favorite Phrases

1. *sō ieba* (そういえば)

This phrase means "speaking of which" or "now that you mention it, and you use it when you are reminded of something and want to talk about it. For example, let's say your friend is talking about party A that took place last week, and that reminds you of party B coming up next week. You can change the subject to party B by saying *sō ieba*, "speaking of parties," and start talking about it. Using *sō ieba* is a natural way to segue into something related to the conversation at hand.

2. *toriaezu* (とりあえず)

Toriaezu (とりあえず) is a handy phrase that means, "in the meantime" or "for now." You can use it to talk about some kind of action you take or decision you make "in the meantime" because for now, you feel like it's better than doing nothing. For example, if you don't know what to order at a restaurant, but at least you know what you want to drink, you can order your drinks using *toriaezu*; *toriaezu bīru* (とりあえずビール), which means, "I'll have a beer for now." The "while we're trying to decide" part is implied.

3. *ryōkai desu* (了解です)

Ryōkai is a word that means "comprehension" or "consent." It is often used as an exclamation in the following ways: by itself (*ryōkai!*), with the copula *desu* (*ryōkai desu!*), and with the past tense verb *shimashita* (*ryōkai shimashita!*). These are all used to show that you have understood and will comply with what someone has told you. The literal meaning of all of these variations is very close to "roger!" or "ten-four!" in English, but they can be used in a variety of formal and informal situations.

4. *tekitō ni* (適切に)

Tekitō (適切) is an adjective that literally means "suitable" or "relevant." When the particle *ni* (に) is added, however, it becomes an adverb. When used as an adverb to describe an action, the original meaning was that the action was done properly, but recently it has started to mean that the action was done "half-heartedly" or "without much care."

Example sentences

Tekitō ni benkyō shimashita. (適切に勉強しました。) - "I studied half-heartedly."

Tekitō ni chūmon shite. (適切に注文して。) - "I'll leave it to you to order/Just order whatever."

5. *tashika ni* (確かに)

The phrase *tashika ni* (確かに) is often used as *aizuchi*, a type of word that was introduced in All About Japanese No.13. *Aizuchi* are interjections that we say in response to someone who is speaking. When you use *tashika ni* after something that someone has said, it means that you agree with them on that point, even if you don't agree with them on other things. In this way, it's very similar to the phrases "true," "indeed," or "for sure!" in English.



Pronunciation

Basic 46 Sounds

1

Grammar Points

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Japanese Pronunciation Series #1 - Basic 46 Sounds

In this lesson, we will introduce you to the vowels and some of the syllables that make up the Japanese language.

Introduction

Before we get into the pronunciation, let's first review how Japanese sounds work. Japanese has a relatively small set of sounds compared with other languages, with only fourteen consonants (k, s, t, n, h, m, y, r, w, g, z, d, b, and p) and 5 vowels (a, e, i, o, and u). In Japanese, there are no such words as the English word "strength," which has clusters of three or more consonants. Japanese is made up of syllables, which are made up of a consonant and a vowel. The only exceptions are the vowels and the "n" sound, which stands alone.

Vowels

2

First we will go over Japanese vowels, which is one of the easiest areas of pronunciation. English has the same five vowels as Japanese (a, e, i, o, and u), but if you consider all of the ways you can pronounce English vowels, you end up with twenty different sounds! In Japanese, the sounds that the vowels make do not change. They sound very similar to the vowels found in Spanish or Italian. Let's take a look at them:

a - pronounced "ah," like the "a" in "father"

e - pronounced "eh," like the "e" in "net"

i - pronounced "ee," like the "ee" in "meet"*

o - pronounced "oh," like the first part of the "o" sound in "so"

u - pronounced "oo," like the "oo" in "mood," but with the lips less rounded*

*Devoicing

There is one small exception for the pronunciations of "i" and "u" that we will call devoicing. That means that they become almost "whispered." This happens when these vowels come between two of the voiceless consonants: p, t, k, s, or h. For

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example, in words like shika ("deer") and hiku ("to pull"), the "i" sound is almost inaudible. This regularly occurs at the ends of the grammatical endings desu and masu as well, which are pronounced [dess] and [mahs], respectively.

Consonants

As we mentioned before, Japanese has the following set of fourteen consonants: k, s, t, n, h, m, y, r, w, g, z, d, b, and p. Each one is paired with a vowel to create a syllable. In this lesson, we will cover consonants "k" through "w."

KA	KI	KU	KE	KO
か	き	く	け	こ

We pronounce the "k" syllables the same as in English.

SA	SHI	SU	SE	SO
さ	し	す	せ	そ

Note how si becomes shi. We pronounce the "s" syllables the same as in English.

TA	CHI	TSU	TE	TO
た	ち	つ	て	と

Note how ti becomes chi and tu becomes tsu. We pronounce most "t" syllables the same as in English, with the exception of tsu. While this sound does exist in English, it never comes at the beginning of a word as it often does in Japanese. This sound is the same as the "ts" in the word "cats." Try saying "cats" without the "ca" to make this sound.

NA	NI	NU	NE	NO
な	に	ぬ	ね	の

We pronounce the "n" syllables the same as in English.

HA	HI	FU	HE	HO
は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ

Note how hu becomes fu. We pronounce most "h" syllables the same as in English, with the exception of fu. The "f" sound in Japanese is a lot lighter than in English. When making this sound, blow air between the lips, and not between the lips and teeth. Imagine this sound as being a combination of both "h" and "f." We pronounce the characters は and へ as "wa" and "e" when used as particles. Refer to the paragraph below for more information.



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MA	MI	MU	ME	MO
ま	み	む	め	も

We pronounce the "m" syllables the same as in English.

YA	YU	YO
や	ゆ	よ

We pronounce the "y" syllables the same as in English. Note that there are no "yi" and "ye" sounds in modern Japanese.

RA	RI	RU	RE	RO
ら	り	る	れ	ろ

When you make an "r" sound in English, you roll your tongue, but it doesn't touch the roof of your mouth. In Japanese, however, you lightly tap the roof of your mouth with your tongue to create an "r" sound. It is similar to a rolling "r," except that it is only done once. It might be easier to make this sound if you think of it like making a light "d" sound. For example, to correctly pronounce the Japanese name Eri, try saying the name "Eddy" quickly and you will get a sound that comes very close to the Japanese "r."

WA	WO
わ	を

We pronounce the "w" in wa the same as in English, but we pronounce wo simply as "o" in Japanese.

N
ん

The pronunciation of the "n" changes slightly depending on what kind of sound comes after it. Before "b," "p," and "m," it sounds more like an "m," as in shimbun ("newspaper"). Before "k" or "g," it sounds like "ng," as in genki ("energetic"). However, these differences are so slight that most Japanese people aren't even aware of them, so do not worry too much about trying to remember these rules. These sound changes occur naturally as you pronounce these words, but if you pronounce

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them a bit differently, people will still understand you.

Pronunciation of Particles

There are a few exceptions when it comes to pronunciation that are important to remember. The topic particle wa and direction particle e are written using characters that are different from their pronunciation.

Particle	Written as...	Pronounced as...
Topic Particle "wa"	は (literally, "ha")	わ (wa)
Direction Particle "e"	へ (literally, "he")	え (e)





Pronunciation

Additional 23 sounds

2

Grammar Points

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Grammar Points

Japanese Pronunciation Series #2 - 23 Additional Sounds

In this lesson, we will introduce you to the rest of the syllables that make up the Japanese language.

Consonants Continued

In this lesson, we'll cover the rest of the consonant + vowel combinations that make up the Japanese sounds. The hiragana symbols we use to portray these sounds are not actually new - they are the same as the ones from the last lesson, only this time we have added a symbol that looks like a double quote, which we call tenten (`), to create a set of different sounds. In the case of the "P" syllables, we have added a circle mark called maru (°).

The "K" row becomes "G"

GA	GI	GU	GE	GO
が	ぎ	ぐ	げ	ご

We pronounce the "g" syllables the same as in English.

The "S" row becomes "Z"

ZA	JI	ZU	ZE	ZO
ざ	じ	ず	ぜ	ぞ

Note how zi becomes ji. We pronounce the "z" syllables the same as in English.

The "T" row becomes "D"

DA	JI	ZU	DE	DO
だ	ぢ	づ	で	ど

Note how di becomes ji and du becomes zu.* We pronounce the "d" syllables the same



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as in English.

The "H" row becomes "B" when adding a tenten (◌̣)

BA	BI	BU	BE	BO
ば	び	ぶ	べ	ぼ

We pronounce the "b" syllables the same as in English.

The "H" row becomes "P" when adding a maru (◌̤)

PA	PI	PU	PE	PO
ぱ	ぴ	ぷ	ぺ	ぽ

We pronounce the "p" syllables the same as in English.

*There are ji and zu sounds in both the "Z" row and the "D" row. We pronounce them the same, but じ and ず (from the "Z" row) are considered standard, and although ぢ and づ (from the "D" row) still show up in a handful of everyday words, they are not as common.

"New" Katakana Sounds

Because the range of syllables (spoken and written) in Japanese is limited, we cannot properly render many foreign sounds in Japanese, so we are unable to make distinctions between certain sets of sounds; for example, "r" and "l", and "s" and "th". The addition of "new" katakana characters has made it possible to represent new sounds into Japanese. Here, we'll go over a few of the more common ones.

FA	FI	FE	FO
ファ	フィ	フェ	フォ

Example words:

ファイル fairu ("file")

フィンランド Finrando ("Finland")

サンタフェ Santa fe ("Santa Fe")

아이폰 aifon ("iPhone")



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VA	VI	VU	VE	VO
ヴァ	ヴィ	ヴ	ヴェ	ヴォ

Example words:

ヴァイオリン vaiorin ("violin")

ヴィクトリア Vikutoria ("Victoria" (name))

デジャヴ deja vu ("déjà vu")

ラスヴェガス Rasu Vegasu ("Las Vegas")

TI	TU
ティ	トゥ

Pronounced in English as "tee" and "too."

Example word:

パーティー pāti ("party")

DI	DU
ディ	ドゥ

Pronounced in English as "dee" and "doo."

Example word:

コメディー comedī ("comedy")

TYU	DYU
テュ	デュ

Pronounced in English as "tyu" and "dyu."

Example word:

デュエット dyuetto ("duet")





Pronunciation
Combination Sounds

3

Grammar Points

2

Grammar Points

Japanese Pronunciation Series #3 - 33 Combination Sounds

Combination Sounds

In this lesson, we will introduce you to thirty-three combination sounds made using small ya, yu, and yo.

Combination sounds are the syllables you get when you combine a full-sized character with a small ya, yu, or yo. The full-sized character is from the second row of the hiragana chart (characters with "i").

KYA	KYU	KYO
きゃ	きゅ	きょ

Example words:

きゃく kyaku ("customer")

きゅう kyū ("nine")

きよか kyoka ("permission")

SHA	SHU	SHO
しゃ	しゅ	しょ

Example words:

しゃかい shakai ("society")

しゅみ shumi ("hobby")

しょくじ shokuji ("meal")

CHA	CHU	CHO
ちゃ	ちゅ	ちよ

Example words:



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ちやいろ chairo ("brown")
ちゅんちゅん chunchun ("chirp chirp")
ちよくせつ chokusetsu ("direct")

NYA	NYU	NYO
にや	にゅ	によ

Example words:

ぐにやぐにや gunyagunya ("crooked")
ニューヨーク Nyūyōku ("New York")
ニョロニョロ nyoronyoro ("slither")

HYA	HYU	HYO
ひや	ひゅ	ひよ

Example words:

ひやく hyaku ("one hundred")
ヒューストン Hyūsuton ("Houston (Texas))"
ひょう hyō ("hail")

MYA	MYU	MYO
みや	みゅ	みよ

Example words:

みやく myaku ("pulse")
ミュージック myūjikku ("music")
みょうじ myōji ("family name")

RYA	RYU	RYO
りや	りゅ	りよ

Example words:

りやく ryaku ("abbreviation")



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りゅう ryū ("dragon")

みりよく miriyoku ("charm")

GYA	GYU	GYO
ぎゃ	ぎゅ	ぎょ

Example words:

ギャグ gyagu ("gag" (joke))

わぎゅう wagyū ("Japanese beef")

きんぎょ kingyo ("goldfish")

JA	JU	JO
じゃ	じゅ	じょ

We write these sounds as ja, ju, and jo using the Hepburn romanization system, instead of jya, jyu, and jyo.

Example words:

ジャズ jazu ("jazz")

じゅんすい junsui ("pure")

じょうだん jōdan ("joke")

BYA	BYU	BYO
びゃ	びゅ	びょ

Example words:

さんびゃく san-byaku ("three hundred")

デビュー debyū ("debut")

びょうき byōki ("illness")

PYA	PYU	PYO
ぴゃ	ぴゅ	ぴょ

Example words:



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はっぴやく ha-ppyaku ("eight hundred")

ピュア pyua ("pure")

ぴよんぴよん pyonpyon ("hop hop")





Pronunciation
Double Consonants

4

Grammar Points

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Grammar Points

Japanese Pronunciation Series #4 - Double consonants

In this lesson, we will introduce you to double consonants and show how they differ from single consonants.

Double Consonants

An important concept in Japanese pronunciation is double consonants, which can show up in the middle of a word (but not in the beginning). These double consonant clusters (kk, ss, tt, cc, etc.) differ from single consonants (k, s, t, c, etc.) in that it takes twice the amount of time to produce them. Think about the word "bookkeeper" in English. We almost pause in the middle as we take extra time to pronounce the double consonant cluster "kk." This is also how it works in Japanese. Whether a consonant is double or not can change the meaning of the word, making double consonants an important concept to learn. Compare the following examples:

Japanese	Translation	Japanese	Translation
かこ (kako)	"past"	かっこ (kakko)	"brackets"
にし (nishi)	"west"	にっし (nisshi)	"daily report"
スパイ (supai)	"spy"	すっぱい (suppai)	"sour"
かた (kata)	"shoulder"	かった (katta)	"won"
きて (kite)	"come"	きって (kitte)	"cut"
あさり (asari)	"clam"	あっさり (assari)	"plain"
いち (ichi)	"one"	いっち (icchi)	"accordance"

In some instances, the Japanese language uses a double "n." We hold this "n" sound for twice as long. Look at the following examples:

おんな (on'na)	"woman", "women"
-------------	------------------



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ざんねん (zan'nen)	"regret", "unfortunate"
----------------	-------------------------

In some cases, the word meaning changes (as in the examples above) depending on whether there is one "n" or two:

こんな (konna)	"this kind of"	こな (kona)	"flour"
ほんね (honne)	"true feelings"	ほね (hone)	"bone"

Pronunciation of "n" (ん)

Let's take a look at the pronunciation of the stand-alone "n" syllable. The pronunciation of this "n" changes slightly depending on what kind of sound comes after it. Before "b", "p", and "m", it sounds more like an "m" as in shimbun ("newspaper"). Before "k" or "g", it sounds like "ng", as in genki ("energetic"). However, these differences are so slight that most Japanese people aren't even aware of them, so do not worry too much about trying to remember these rules. These sound changes occur naturally as you pronounce these words, but if you pronounce them a bit differently, people will still understand you.

When "n" comes before...	The "n" sound changes to...	Example word	Sounds like...
b/p/m	→ m	しんぶん shinbun "newspaper"	shimbun
k/g	→ ng	げんき genki "energetic"	gengki





Pronunciation

Long vowels

5

Grammar Points

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Grammar Points

Japanese Pronunciation Series #5 - Long vowels

The focus of this lesson is to introduce you to long vowels and explain how they differ from short vowels.

Long Vowels vs. Short Vowels

The concept of long and short vowel sounds is an important concept to understand when learning Japanese pronunciation. In Japanese, vowels can be lengthened, and there is a very distinct difference between long and short vowels. Note that in this lesson, a macron (small horizontal line over a vowel) denotes a long vowel that we hold for twice as long as a regular vowel.

Double vowels and vowel pairs	Sounds like...
ああ aa	あー ahh
いい ii	いー ee
うう uu	うー ooh
ええ ee えい ei	えー ehh
おお oo おう ou	おー ohh

In many cases, whether the vowel is long or short will determine the meaning of the word. Let's illustrate this with some examples:

かど	カード
kado	kādo
"corner"	"card"

In the case of *kādo* ("card"), we hold the "a" sound for approximately twice as long as the "a" sound in *kado* ("corner"). As you can see, the meaning is very different depending on whether the vowel is long or short! Let's look at a few more examples:



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おばさん	おばあさん
o-ba-san	o-bā-san
"aunt"	"grandmother"

おじさん	おじいさん
o-ji-san	o-ji-san
"uncle"	"grandfather"

くつ	くつう
kutsu	kutsū
"shoes"	"pain"

エゴ	えいご
ego	ei go
"ego"	"English"

とる	とおる
toru	tōru
"to take"	"to pass through"

As you can see in the first chart above, the vowel combinations of "ei" and "ou" sound like "ē" and "ō," respectively.

More examples:

Japanese	Rōmaji	Translation	Sounds like...
せんせい	sensei	"teacher"	せんせー sensē
どうも	doumo	"Thanks."	ども dōmo

In the first word sensei, the combination of "e" + "i" sounds just a long "e"



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vowel. In the second word *mō*, we have a combination of "o" + "u," but what we hear is only the "o" sound lengthened. We don't hear the "u" that comes at the end.





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