

Welcome to the Japanese course!

While many consider Japanese to be very difficult to learn for native English speakers, this is only partially true. Many aspects of the Japanese language are quite simple, such as the sound system, and yes, even most of the grammar.

Writing Systems

Japanese uses three different writing systems, **hiragana**, **katakana**, and **kanji**.

Hiragana is the most basic Japanese syllabary. It's like an alphabet that uses **syllables** instead of individual **sounds**.

Katakana is the syllabary used to write foreign words and some noises. Although it's different from hiragana, it represents the exact same **syllables**.

Kanji are Chinese characters used in the Japanese language to write individual nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Kanji are not phonetic, meaning you need to memorize each pronunciation individually. In this course, we introduce kanji gradually and methodically.

Enjoy the course!

Hiragana Part I: Pronunciation

Below are the most basic forms of Japanese hiragana. We'll be introducing some more later as well.

Japanese	IPA, Notes
あ	[a]
い	[i]
う	[u], like the oo in <i>food</i>
え	[e]
お	[o]
か	[ka]
き	[ki]
く	[ku]

Japanese	IPA, Notes
け	[ke]
こ	[ko]
さ	[sa]
し	[ɕi], like the <i>shee</i> in <i>sheep</i>
す	[su], although it can shorten to more of a [s] at the end of a word
せ	[se]
そ	[so]
た	[ta]
ち	[tɕi], like the <i>tch</i> in <i>itchy</i>
つ	[tɕu], like the <i>ts</i> in <i>cats</i>
て	[te]
と	[to]
な	[na]
に	[ni]
ぬ	[nu]
ね	[ne]
の	[no]
は	[ha], although pronounced like [ɰa] or "wa" as a particle
ひ	[çi], like the <i>h</i> in <i>human</i>
ふ	[ɸu], roughly between a short "hoo" and "foo"
へ	[he], although pronounced like [e] or "eh" as a particle
ほ	[ho]
ま	[ma]
み	[mi]

Japanese	IPA, Notes
む	[mɯ]
め	[me]
も	[mo]
や	[ja]
ゆ	[jɯ]
よ	[jo]
ら	[ra], like the <i>t</i> in the American pronunciation of <i>butter</i>
り	[ri]
る	[rɯ]
れ	[re]
ろ	[ro]
わ	[ɰa]
を	[o], although it's most often romanized as "wo"
ん	[n] or [ŋ], like the <i>n</i> in <i>pink</i> , producing a [m] when combined with a bilabial stop, hence "tempura" and not "tenpura"

As the only solitary consonant in hiragana, ん is especially notable because it is only found at the end of another syllable. In other words, you will never read a Japanese word that begins with ん.

Hiragana Part II: Dakuten

Putting two little dashes or **dakuten** at the upper right corner of a hiragana syllable **voices the consonant**. It changes the pronunciation of the hiragana in the following way:

Sound	Sound with Dakuten	Example
k	g	か (ka) → が (ga)
s	z	さ (sa) → ざ (za), し (shi) → じ (ji)*

Sound	Sound with Dakuten	Example
t	d	た (ta) → だ (da), つ (tsu) → づ (zu)*
h	b	は (ha) → ば (ba)

Putting a little circle or **handakuten** at the upper right corner changes the pronunciation of the は-ひ-ふ-へ-ほ hiragana in the following way:

Sound	Sound with Handakuten	Example
h	p	は (ha) → ぱ (pa)

Hiragana Part III: Small つ

Putting a つ (small tsu) between two hiragana syllables doubles the letter right after つ and introduces a short pause between two sounds. See some examples below:

Without つ	With つ
きて (kite)	きって (kitte)
もと (moto)	もっと (motto)
あさり (asari)	あっさり (assari)

Hiragana Part IV: Big and Small Characters

Lastly, this skill introduces the big and small versions of three sounds in hiragana. A small や、ゆ、 or よ changes the pronunciation of a word in the following way:

Big や-ゆ-よ	Small や-ゆ-よ
きや [ki-ya]	きゃ [kya]
きゆ [ki-yu]	きゅ [kyu]
きよ [ki-yo]	きょ [kyo]

The small character changes the two-syllable construction into a one-syllable construction. Sometimes, the difference can lead to a real change in meaning, as shown below:

Big よ	Small よ
びよういん [bi-yō-in] "beauty salon"	びよういん [byō-in] "hospital"

Saying Thank You

The phrase "thank you" in Japanese is dependent on the situation. Below is a table of the most common forms, from least to most formal. Note that the formality increases with the length of the phrase.

Japanese	Explanation
どうも	Thanks , used with friends.
ありがとう	Thank you , used with friends.
どうもありがとう	Thank you very much , used with friends.
ありがとうございます	Thank you , used with strangers, teachers, and bosses.
どうもありがとうございます	Thank you very much , used with strangers, teachers, and bosses.

Saying Thank You for a Past Action

If you'd like to thank someone for something they did in the past, you change the ございます ending to ございました。

Japanese	Explanation
ありがとうございました	Thank you for what you did , used with strangers, teachers, and bosses.
どうもありがとうございました	Thank you very much for what you did , used with strangers, teachers, and bosses.

Katakana

This lesson will begin introducing katakana. Like hiragana, katakana is a Japanese phonetic writing system. It's used for several things, but one of the most common uses is for foreign words.

Japanese	IPA, Notes
ア	[a]
エ	[e]
オ	[o]
イ	[i]
リ	[ri]
ラ	[ra], like the <i>t</i> in the American pronunciation of <i>butter</i>
カ	[ka]
メ	[me]
キ	[ki]
フ	[ɸʊ], roughly between a short "hoo" and "foo"
コ	[ko]
マ	[ma]
シ	[ɕi], like the <i>shee</i> in <i>sheep</i>
ン	[n] or [ŋ], like the <i>n</i> in <i>pink</i> , producing a [m] when combined with a bilabial stop, hence "tempura" and not "tenpura"
ス	[sʊ], although it can shorten to more of a [s] at the end of a word
タ	[ta]
ロ	[ro]
ヨ	[jo]
ー	long vowel mark, used to extend the vowel sound that precedes it

Katakana with Dakuten

Japanese	IPA, Notes
ギ	[gi]
ジ	[dʒi], like the <i>jee</i> in <i>jeep</i>
パ	[pa]
ピ	[pi]

More Katakana

Japanese	IPA, Notes
ド	[do]
ペ	[pe]
ツ	[tsw], like the <i>ts</i> in <i>cats</i>
ナ	[na]
ダ	[da]
ブ	[bu]
ル	[ru]
ベ	[be]
ム	[mu]
ネ	[ne]
ト	[to]
ヤ	[ja]
ポ	[po]
ガ	[ga]
ウ	[u], like the <i>oo</i> in <i>food</i>
ノ	[no]

Japanese	IPA, Notes
ワ	[ɰa]
デ	[de]

Even More Katakana

Japanese	IPA, Notes
ク	[kɰ]
ソ	[so]
テ	[te]
バ	[ba]
サ	[sa]
ゼ	[ze]
モ	[mo]
ボ	[bo]
ホ	[ho]
カ	[ka]
ニ	[ni]
ゴ	[go]
ユ	[jɰ]
ケ	[ke]
チ	[tɕi], like the <i>tch</i> in <i>itchy</i>
ヌ	[nu]
ビ	[bi]
レ	[re]

If you sound out the words below using katakana characters, you might find some familiar words! Some of the pronunciation is a little different than its English equivalent, though.

Japanese	Romaji	English
カメラ	kamera	camera
アメリカ	Amerika	the US
マリア	Maria	Maria (female given name)
アフリカ	Afurika	Africa
メキシコ	Mekishiko	Mexico
フランス	Furansu	France
エリカ	Erika	Erika (female given name)
マリオ	Mario	Mario (male given name)

Just be careful - not all words written in katakana were taken from English!

Japanese	Romaji	English
イギリス	Igirisu	the UK
イタリア	Itaria	Italy
ローマ	Rōma	Rome

Not all foreign loan words in Japanese are directly equivalent to their English counterparts! For instance, in Japanese アメリカ (Amerika) isn't commonly used to refer to all of North America or to both North and South America - it's used almost exclusively to mean "the United States." However, イギリス (Igirisu) can be used to refer to both "the UK" and "England."

Introduction to Kanji

This lesson introduces the non-phonetic writing system of Japanese, kanji. **Kanji** literally means "Chinese characters," and they're used to build content words like nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Kanji Readings

So how do you read kanji? Most kanji have at least two possible readings. Typically, one reading is derived from a native Japanese word, and one reading is derived from a Chinese loanword. These are called "kunyomi" ("meaning reading") and "onyomi" ("sound reading") respectively.

Let's take the kanji for "country," 国。 On its own, we use the Japanese "kunyomi" reading, くに。 In Japanese, くに means "country." However, in compounds, we use the "onyomi" reading of こく。 Therefore, China, 中国 or "middle country," is read as ちゅうごく。

Rendaku

So why isn't it ちゅうごく? This is due to a phenomenon known as "rendaku" or "sequential voicing." Syllables that come later in a word are sometimes voiced and marked with a dakuten. This is often rather unpredictable, so rendaku words should be memorized individually.

Example Kanji

Below is a table of the six kanji that are introduced in this lesson, complete with possible readings.

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
人	Person	ひと	じん、にん
中	Middle	なか	ちゅう
国	Country	くに	こく
日	Sun, Day	ひ	にち、じつ
本	Origin, Book	もと	ほん
田	Rice Paddy	た	でん

You may have noticed that the word Japan, or 日本 is composed of the kanji meaning "sun" and "origin." This word was first adopted by the Chinese, and to them, Japan was off to the east, the place where the sun rose or "originated."

Basic Grammar

One thing that makes Japanese very different from English is the Japanese tendency to **drop the subject of the sentence** when the meaning is clear from context. Statements usually refer to oneself, while questions usually address the person you're speaking with.

The Question Marker

Adding question marker か at the end will make the affirmative (positive) sentence into question. If the sentences end in ~です, it's easy to formulate questions by using ~ですか。

Positive	Question
アメリカ人です。(I'm American.)	アメリカ人ですか。(Are you American?)
がくせいです。(I'm a student.)	がくせいですか。(Are you a student?)

Pronouns

Pronouns are relatively rare in Japanese, but they are sometimes used to explicitly specify the subject or topic of a sentence. Below are some of the most common ones.

Person	Singular	Plural
First	私・わたし is used in polite settings by women and men, used by women in most other settings. 僕・ぼく is used by men in informal settings.	私たち・わたしたち is most common. 我々・われわれ sounds rather stiff and business-like.
Second	あなた is used in polite settings, however, if you know someone's name, it's best to call them by their name, typically followed by さん or せんせい。君・きみ is used by men in informal settings, specifically to those on or	あなたたち is used in formal settings, and 君たち・きみたち is used in informal settings, especially to subordinates.

Person	Singular	Plural
	beneath one's social level.	
Third - Male	彼・かれ	彼ら・かれら is also used for a mixed-gendered group
Third - Female	彼女・かのじょ	彼女たち・かのじょたち

Kanji from this Skill

Below is a table of the eight kanji that are introduced in this lesson, complete with possible readings.

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
学	Education	まな•ぶ	がく
生	Born, Raw	なま、い•きる	せい
先	Previous	さき	せん
英	English		えい
語	Language	かた•る	ご
何	What	なに	
名	Name	な	めい、みょう
前	Before	まえ	ぜん

Object Particle

The marker を is attached to things or people, and means that they are the target of the verb. Subjects are often omitted in Japanese sentences. Unlike English, the location of the verbs are usually at the end of the sentence. を was once pronounced wo, but now it's the [o] sound.

Object	を	Verb	English
みず	を	のみます。	I drink water.

Object	を	Verb	English
さかな	を	たべます。	I eat fish.

General Pronouns

This lesson also introduces the general pronouns これ、それ、あれ、 and どれ、 which translate to "this," "that," "that (over there)," and "which (one)," respectively.

	こ	そ	あ	ど
Japanese	これ	それ	あれ	どれ
English	this	that	that (over there)	which
Notes	closer to the speaker	closer to the listener	far from both the speaker and listener	question

Kanji from this Skill

Below is a table of the two kanji that are introduced in this skill, complete with possible readings.

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
水	Water	みず	すい
食	Eat	た•べる	しょく

Kanji from this Skill

Below is a table of the six kanji that are introduced in this skill, complete with possible readings.

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
一	One	ひと•つ	いち
二	Two	ふた•つ	に
三	Three	みつ•つ	さん

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
時	Time	とき	じ
今	Now	いま	こん
分	Minute, Part	わ•かる	ぶん、ぶん

Directional Particle

The particle へ indicates a direction towards which something or someone moves. This movement is the direction away from the current location. When used as a particle, へ is pronounced as [e].

Location and Time Particle

The particle に with a time expression indicates a specific point in time. に can also express times on a clock, days of the week, or years.

Direction	English	Location or Time	English
会社・かいしゃへ	to the office	3時・じに	at 3 o'clock
学校・がっこうへ	to school	月曜日・げつようびに	on Monday
日本・にほんへ	to Japan	5月・がつに	in May
アメリカへ	to America	2016年・ねんに	in 2016

Kanji from this Skill

Below is a table of the four kanji that are introduced in this skill, complete with possible readings.

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
行	Go	い•く	こう
校	School		こう
午	Noon		ご

Kanji	Meaning	Kunyomi Reading	Onyomi Reading
後	After	あと、うし•ろ	ご

The Verbs あります and います

あります and います are very special verbs in Japanese that refer to something's existence. They're often translated into English as "there is" or "there are." Even though they're often translated identically, they describe different objects:

- あります is used for **inanimate objects**, like books, rooms, televisions, and apples.
- います is used for **animate objects**, like people, cats, dogs, and other animals.

Japanese Counting Words

The Japanese language uses special **counting words** to count things, actions, and events. You use these words when you want to mention a specific number of a certain noun. Below is how they are typically formed.

Noun	Particle	Number + Counter	Verb
鳥・とり	が	二羽・にわ	います

- 鳥が二羽います means "there are two birds."

In Japanese, you also have the option of placing the number and counter before the noun, but this is less common and typically involves an additional particle.

Number + Counter	の	Noun	Particle	Verb
二羽・にわ	の	鳥・とり	が	います

- 二羽の鳥がいます also means "there are two birds."

Below is a table for 羽、the counting word introduced in this lesson. 羽 is a counter used just for birds and rabbits.

Number	Form of 羽
1・一・いち	一羽・いちわ
2・二・に	二羽・にわ
3・三・さん	三羽・さんわ
4・四・よん	四羽・よんわ
5・五・ご	五羽・ごわ
6・六・ろく	六羽・ろくわ
7・七・なな	七羽・しちわ or ななわ
8・八・はち	八羽・はちわ
9・九・きゅう	九羽・きゅうわ
10・十・じゅう	十羽・じゅうわ

Kanji from this Skill

Below you will find the kanji for all of the vocabulary words in this skill.

Kanji	Hiragana	Meaning	Components
台所	だいどころ	kitchen	pedestal + place
部屋	へや	room	division + dwelling
風呂	ふろ	bath	wind + spine
庭	にわ	yard, garden	
家	いえ	house	
窓	まど	window	
猫	ねこ	cat	
犬	いぬ	dog	
鳥	とり	bird	

Kanji	Hiragana	Meaning	Components
椅子	いす	chair	chair + small thing
机	つくえ	desk	

Sentence-Ending Particles

This lesson introduces two of the most common sentence-ending particles, *ね* and *よ*. Used exclusively in conversation, they communicate intention rather than concrete meaning, and as such, they are difficult to translate directly.

ね is used to seek passive agreement from the person being spoken to, much like "... right?" or "... correct?" in English.

- いい天気 (てんき) ですね means "nice weather, **isn't it?**" and is a common expression on mild, sunny days.

よ is used to express certainty in a matter of uncertainty, as if to emphasize the truth of the words that come before it. This sense of emphasis mirrors the use of the word "does" in the English sentence "She (actually) does enjoy tennis."

- お元気 (げんき) ですか？ means "are you doing well?" and a valid response would be as follows.
- 元気 (げんき) ですよ means "I am doing well (you know)" and communicates that perhaps the answerer's health was actually poor recently and they intend to underline their present healthiness.

Japanese Counting Words

The Japanese language uses special **counting words** to count things, actions, and events. Below is a table for *つ* and *個*, the counting words introduced in this lesson. *つ* is a counter that can be used for anything, while *個* is restricted to physical objects that are relatively small and round.

Number	Form of つ	Form of 個
1・一・いち	一つ・ひとつ	一個・いっこ

Number	Form of つ	Form of 個
2・二・に	二つ・ふたつ	二個・にこ
3・三・さん	三つ・みっつ	三個・さんこ
4・四・よん	四つ・よっつ	四個・よんこ
5・五・ご	五つ・いつつ	五個・ごこ
6・六・ろく	六つ・むっつ	六個・ろっこ
7・七・なな	七つ・ななつ	七個・ななこ
8・八・はち	八つ・やっつ	八個・はっこ
9・九・きゅう	九つ・ここのつ	九個・きゅうこ
10・十・じゅう	十・とお	十個・じゅっこ

Familial Terms

Japanese uses a number of terms for family members. Some use the honorific form, which is typically reserved for someone else's family members, while others use a shorter, more casual form, reserved for your own family members.

Still, these rules are not hard and fast. You will still hear children use the honorific form to address their own mother or father.

Family Member	Honorific Form	Personal Form
Older Brother	お兄さん (おにいさん)	兄 (あに)
Older Sister	お姉さん (おねえさん)	姉 (あね)
Younger Brother	弟さん (おとうとさん)	弟 (おとうと)
Younger Sister	妹さん (いもうとさん)	妹 (いもうと)
Child	お子さん (おこさん)	子供 (こども)
Parents	ご両親 (ごりょうしん)	両親 (りょうしん)
Father	お父さん (おとうさん)	父 (ちち)

Family Member	Honorific Form	Personal Form
Mother	お母さん (おかあさん)	母 (はは)
Grandfather	お祖父さん (おじいさん)	祖父 (そふ)
Grandmother	お祖母さん (おばあさん)	祖母 (そぼ)
Uncle Older than Parent	伯父さん (おじさん)	伯父 (おじ)
Aunt Older than Parent	伯母さん (おばさん)	伯母 (おば)
Uncle Younger than Parent	叔父さん (おじさん)	叔父 (おじ)
Aunt Younger than Parent	叔母さん (おばさん)	叔母 (おば)
Husband	ご主人 (ごしゅじん)	夫 (おっと)
Wife	奥さん (おくさん)	妻 (つま)

Determiners

Just like in English, determiners in Japanese come before a noun and signify both its location and relationship with the speaker. Japanese also has two words for "that" depending on whether or not the listener is close to the noun or not.

- その本 (ほん) は高い (たかい) です means "that book is expensive" when the book in question is far from you but near the person you're speaking to.
- あの本 (ほん) は高い (たかい) です means "that book is expensive" when the book in question is far away from both you and the person you're speaking to.
- どの本 (ほん) は高い (たかい) ですか？ means "which book is expensive?" no matter where the book in question happens to be.

Place Marker

The particle で usually shows the location of action or event, such as "at" "in" or "on" in English. で also indicates "with" "by" or "using" to show a language or tools being used.

Adjectives

This lesson also introduces Japanese adjectives, which are divided into い-adjectives and な-adjectives.

い-Adjectives

い-adjectives are **true adjectives** that have been in the Japanese language since the very beginning. All of them end in い、 although not all adjectives that end in い are in fact い-adjectives. See how they operate using the example い-adjective おいしい、 meaning "delicious."

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしいです。	This is delicious .

Note that all い-adjectives can drop the です ending in casual speech. This is grammatical as well.

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしい。	This is delicious .

When placed before a noun, there's no change to the spelling of an い-adjective.

Sentence	Translation
おいしいすしです。	It is delicious sushi.

We will be introducing the other major category of Japanese adjectives later in the course.

Large Numbers

Japanese has certain conventions for writing large numbers. Below are the kanji and readings for a few of them that will be introduced in this lesson.

Japanese	English
百 (ひゃく)	one hundred

Japanese	English
千 (せん)	one thousand
万 (まん)	ten thousand

百 and 千 can be used in isolation to mean 100 and 1,000.

Example	Translation
百円 (ひゃくえん)	100 yen
千円 (せんえん)	1,000 yen

It would sound unnatural in Japanese to write 一百 or 一千 when you have 100 or 1,000 of something. However, 万 functions with the opposite convention; when you have 10,000 of something, it is customary to put 一 in front of it.

Example	Translation
一万円 (いちまんえん)	10,000 yen

Past Tense

This lesson introduces the past tense of verbs. In Japanese, there are other varieties of tense, but we will cover those in later lessons. Changing a verb from the present/future tense to the past tense is rather simple.

- パンを食 (た) べます means either "I will eat bread" or "I eat bread."
- パンを食 (た) べました means "I ate bread."

Verb Tense	Positive Ending
Present	～ます
Future	～ます
Past	～ました

Instead of changing the negative ending **～ません** to make a negative past tense verb ("did not eat"), we simply add the word **でした** to the end.

- **パンを食 (た) べません** means either "I will not eat bread" or "I do not eat bread."
- **パンを食 (た) べませんでした** means "I did not eat bread."

Verb Tense	Negative Ending
Present	～ません
Future	～ません
Past	～ませんでした

The endings above apply to all verbs that end with **～ます**.

Expressing Position

As noted in an earlier lesson, Japanese has two special verbs that mean "be" or "exist" depending on the animateness of the subject. **います** is used for living things, while **あります** is used for inanimate objects. We use these verbs to describe someone or something's position relative to something else.

Topic	Location	の	Directional	Verb
猫・ねこ・は	机・つくえ	の	上・うえ・に	います

- **猫は机の上にあります** means "the cat is on the desk."

Topic	Location	の	Directional	Verb
本・ほん・は	机・つくえ	の	上・うえ・に	あります

- **本は机の上にあります** means "the book is on the desk."

Notice how the verb changes depending on whether or not the topic is animate.

Counting People

Counting people in Japanese is relatively easy, but there are a couple irregular forms. Please reference the following table to learn how to count people.

Number	Form of 人
1・一・いち	一人・ひとり
2・二・に	二人・ふたり
3・三・さん	三人・さんにん
4・四・よん	四人・よにん
5・五・ご	五人・ごにん
6・六・ろく	六人・ろくにん
7・七・なな	七人・しちにん
8・八・はち	八人・はちにん
9・九・きゅう	九人・きゅうにん
10・十・じゅう	十人・じゅうにん

You will also see another counter, 枚 (まい), which is used to count flat things. Thankfully, 枚 has no irregular forms, and so it's read the same way regardless of the number that comes before it.

Not Much

あまり is a word you can use with negative sentences to express ideas like “not much,” “not often” or “not many.” Below are a few examples of its usage.

Japanese	English
映画はあまり見ません。	I do not watch a lot of movies.
散歩はあまりしません。	I do not go on walks very often .

Familial Terms

Japanese uses a number of terms for family members. Some use the honorific form, which is typically reserved for someone else's family members, while others use a shorter, more casual form, reserved for your own family members.

Still, these rules are not hard and fast. You will still hear children use the honorific form to address their own mother or father.

Family Member	Honorific Form	Personal Form
Husband	ご主人 (ごしゅじん)	夫 (おっと)
Wife	奥さん (おくさん)	妻 (つま)
Child	お子さん (おこさん)	子供 (こども)
Grandfather	お祖父さん (おじいさん)	祖父 (そふ)
Grandmother	お祖母さん (おばあさん)	祖母 (そぼ)

Not your uncle but your grandfather!

Sometimes, changing just one character can entirely change the meaning of a word. Japanese learners often make this mistake with the words for **uncle/grandfather** and **aunt/grandmother**. Please double-check the length of your vowel!

Japanese	English
おじさん	uncle
おじいさん	grandfather
おばさん	aunt
おばあさん	grandmother

Arriving and Departing Phrases

This skill also teaches a special set of Japanese phrases when someone enters or exits a home. These are in widespread use throughout Japan.

One makes the **statement** when one either departs from or arrives in a home, and one makes the **response** upon hearing the corresponding statement.

	Statement	Response

	Statement	Response
When Departing	いってきます	いってらっしゃい
Translation	"I'm leaving!"	"Take care!"
When Returning	ただいま	おかえりなさい
Translation	"I'm home!"	"Welcome back!"

Negative い-Adjectives

When い-adjectives are switched from positive to negative, they undergo a spelling change. The characteristic い-ending switches to a く、 and the phrase meaning "not" is added to the end. The final result is an ending such as くないです。 See the example below.

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしいです。	This is delicious.
これはおいしくないです。	This is not delicious .

Just like with positive い-adjectives, all negative い-adjectives can drop the です ending in casual speech.

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしくない。	This is not delicious .

To make the speech more formal, one can change the ending from くないです to ありません。

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしくありません。	This is not delicious .

Wearing Clothing

Japanese has many translations for the English words "to wear" or "to put on," depending on where on the body the clothes are worn. Below are some examples taught in this lesson.

Japanese	Notes
着ます・きます	wear , on the whole body or upper body
被ります・かぶります	wear , on the head
履きます・はきます	wear , on the lower body

Together!

In Japanese, there are different ways to ask someone to do something with you. Your verb ending can subtly change the nature of your request or suggestion.

Verb Ending	Meaning in English
~ませんか	"Would you like to...?" / "Do you want to...?"
~ましょう	"Let's..."
~ましょうか?	"Shall we...?" / "Should we...?"

Japanese	English
プールで泳ぎませんか?	Would you like to swim at the pool?
プールで泳ぎましょう。	Let's swim at the pool.
プールで泳ぎましょうか?	Shall we swim at the pool?

Weeks and Months

Japanese has specific words for ideas like "last week," "next week" and "this week." There is even a word for "the week after next"! Maybe you'll notice a pattern with how these words are formed!

Word	Reading	Meaning
今月	こんげつ	this month
来月	らいげつ	next month

Word	Reading	Meaning
先月	せんげつ	last month
Word	Reading	Meaning
今週	こんしゅう	this week
来週	らいしゅう	next week
先週	せんしゅう	last week
再来週	さらいしゅう	the week after next

Playing an Instrument

Japanese uses different verbs to talk about playing different kinds of musical instruments. In this skill, you will encounter the verb used for playing a string instrument - **弾きます** (ひきます). Don't forget that the piano is included as a string instrument!

Japanese	English
ピアノを弾きます。	I play the piano.
ギターを弾きます。	I play the guitar.

Isn't it?

In Japanese, it is common to ask a question in the negative form in order to solicit agreement. These sentences are commonly translated as "Isn't it...?" in English.

Japanese	English
暗いですか？	Is it dark?
暗くないですか？	Isn't it dark?

Did you notice the difference? When the question is asked with a regular adjective form, the English meaning is "**Is it...?**" When it is asked with an adjective in the negative form, the English translation changes to "**Isn't it...?**"

Adverbs

In Japanese, you can change an -い adjective to an adverb by dropping the -い and replacing it with -く. Adverbs are usually words that end in **-ly** in English and describe *how* something happens.

Adjective	Meaning	Adverb	Meaning
強い (つよい)	strong	強く (つよく)	strongly
弱い (よわい)	weak	弱く (よわく)	weakly

Here are some examples of how these different forms are used.

Japanese	English
風が強いです。	The wind is strong .
強い風がふきます。	A strong wind blows.
風が強くふきます。	The wind blows strongly .

Very, quite, or not at all!

In this skill, you will encounter words that can modify the severity of your sentences.

全然 (ぜんぜん) and 全く (まったく) can both be used with negative sentences to mean "not at all."

Japanese	English
この野菜は 全然 おいしくありません。	These vegetables are not delicious at all .
牛乳は まったく 多くありません。	There is not much milk at all .

とても and 大変 (たいへん) can both be used in affirmative sentences to mean "very."

Japanese	English
このラーメンは とても おいしいです。	This ramen is very tasty.
大変 おいしいです。	It is very tasty.

結構 (けっこう) can be used in affirmative sentences to mean "quite."

Japanese	English
塩が結構多いですね。	There is quite a lot of salt, isn't there?

A Small Amount

少ない (すくない) is an adjective that means "few" or "not much." Be careful – although the word ends in -ない, it isn't the negative form of the adjective! The negative form of 少ない is actually 少なくない (すくなくない). That's a mouthful!

Japanese	English
カレーが少ないです。	There is not much curry.

Big and Small

There are a few adjectives that have both an -い and a -な adjective form. With these adjectives, it is common to use the -な adjective form when the adjective comes *before* the noun it is modifying. "Big" and "small" are two such adjectives.

-い adjective	-な adjective	Meaning
大きい (おおきい)	大きな (おおきな)	big, large
小さい (ちいさい)	小さな (ちいさな)	small

Japanese	English
その銀行は大きいです。	That bank is big.
それは大きな銀行です。	That is a big bank.

Big or Wide?

The word 広い (ひろい) means "wide" and 狭い (せまい) means "narrow," but these words are often used in Japanese in situations in which we'd use the words "big" or "small" in English. For instance, when you're describing the internal area of a room as

"large," you usually use the word 広い rather than 大きい . 広い is sometimes also translated as "spacious."

Japanese	English
この病院は広いです。	This hospital is spacious. (large inside)
この部屋は狭いです。	This room is small. (narrow inside)

Where?

Japanese has different levels of formality, and sometimes there are different words with the same meaning that differ by formality level. You'll encounter some of them in this skill.

Casual	Formal	Meaning
こっち	こちら	here, this way (close to the speaker)
そっち	そちら	there, that way (close to the listener)
あっち	あちら	over there, over that way (far from both the listener and the speaker)
どっち	どちら	where?, which direction?

An Empty Stomach

In Japanese, when you ask someone if they are hungry, the expression is お腹がすきましたか? (おなかがすきましたか?)

Although the Japanese expression is written in past tense, its understood meaning would be equivalent to the English expression "Are you hungry?" It literally translates to something like, "Has your stomach been emptied?" – because if your stomach has become empty, that means that you're hungry now!

Japanese Counting Words

The Japanese language uses special **counting words** to count things, actions, and events. Below is a table for 日、 the counting word introduced in this lesson. 日 is the counter for days.

Number	Form of 日
1・一・いち	一日・ついたち
2・二・に	二日・ふつか
3・三・さん	三日・みっか
4・四・よん	四日・よっか
5・五・ご	五日・いつか
6・六・ろく	六日・むいか
7・七・なな	七日・なのか
8・八・はち	八日・ようか
9・九・きゅう	九日・こののか
10・十・じゅう	十日・とおか
20・二十・にじゅう	二十日・はつか

な-Adjectives

This lesson teaches the first な -adjective in the course, きれい、 meaning "pretty" or "clean." Although it looks like an い -adjective, it belongs to the な -adjective category.

な -adjectives are **nominal adjectives** that have been imported from other countries over centuries, mainly from China. There is no pattern as to what they look like, aside from the fact they're not likely to end in an い。 Remember that きれい is an exception. See how they operate using the example of きれい below.

Sentence	Translation
これはきれいです。	This is pretty .

Note that な -adjectives typically do not drop the です ending in a construction like the one above.

When placed before a noun, a な -adjective adds a characteristic な between the adjective and the noun that follows.

Sentence	Translation
きれいな花です。	It is a pretty flower.

People 1

Japanese verbs, including the copula です、 can be used as they are with any subject, regardless of gender or number. This means that Japanese sentences often have many possible English equivalents.

Japanese	English
がくせいです。	He's a student.
がくせいです。	She's a student.
がくせいです。	They're students.

This skill introduces several words that describe people. You can reference them below.

Japanese	English
がくせい "gakusei"	student
ともだち "tomodachi"	friend
いしゃ "isha"	doctor
せんせい "sensei"	teacher

て-Form

The て-form or で-form of a verb is a very important grammatical construct in Japanese that is used in several contexts.

Requests

～て / ～で + ください is used for requests. It means "please + [verb]"

- よんでください means "please read."

You can also attach nouns to these requests to get more specific.

- 本をよんでください means "please read the book."

English	Short Form	Polite Form	Request
do	する	します	してください
read	よむ	よみます	よんでください
turn on	つける	つけます	つけてください
close	しめる	しめます	しめてください
open	あける	あけます	あけてください

What was happening?

～て / ～で + います can be used to describe continuing action in the present, but did you know that you can use the -て form of the verb to describe continuing action in the past, too? Instead of ～います, you would use ～いました after the -て form of a verb to describe an ongoing action that occurred in the past. Look at how the verb endings can change the meaning of a sentence.

Japanese	English
雨が降ります	It rains
雨が降っています	It is raining
雨が降りました	It rained
雨が降っていました	It was raining

Counting Small Animals

Japanese has a lot of counter words that change depending on the object or creature being counted. Sometimes, the counter word even depends on the size of the thing being counted! For instance, the counter word ～匹 (ひき) is used to count *small*

animals. However, the reading of the word 一匹 changes depending on the number that comes before it.

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
一匹	いっぴき (ippiki)	one (small animal)
二匹	にひき (nihiki)	two (small animals)
三匹	さんびき (sanbiki)	three (small animals)
四匹	よんひき (yonhiki)	four (small animals)
五匹	ごひき (gohiki)	five (small animals)
六匹	ろっぴき (roppiki)	six (small animals)
七匹	ななひき (nanahiki)	seven (small animals)
八匹	はっぴき (happiki)	eight (small animals)
九匹	きゅうひき (kyuuhiki)	nine (small animals)
十匹	じゅうひき (juppiki)	ten (small animals)

The Water Radical

Kanji characters are made up of different component parts called **radicals**. Did you know that a kanji's radicals can sometimes give you a hint about the kanji's meaning? For instance, kanji containing the radical 氵 often have something to do with water. If you look at the words below, you can see that they all contain the radical 氵 on the left side of the kanji character, and all of them involve water. You might have noticed this radical in other kanji you've already seen, too!

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
海	うみ	sea
池	いけ	pond
泳ぎます	およぎます	swim

て-Form

We will now take a look at three more purposes for the て-form of verbs.

Ongoing Actions

～て / ～で + います is used for actions in progress.

- よんでいます means "I am reading."

We also use this construction for ongoing actions that would ordinarily use the present perfect construction in English.

- 映画ははじまっています means "The movie has begun."

～て / ～で + いません is the corresponding negative construction.

- よんでいません means "I am not reading."

English	Short Form	Polite Form	Ongoing Action
do	する	します	しています
read	よむ	よみます	よんでいます
eat	たべる	たべます	たべています
drink	のむ	のみます	のんでいます

Prohibitions

～て + は + いません is used when telling someone that they must not or should not do something.

- よんではいけません means "you must not read."
- あの本をよんではいけません means "you must not read that book."

English	Short Form	Polite Form	Prohibition
do	する	します	してはいけません
read	よむ	よみます	よんではいけません

English	Short Form	Polite Form	Prohibition
eat	食べる	たべます	たべてはいけません
drink	のむ	のみます	のんではいけません

Linking Sentences

We already learned the words と and や that mean "and" when combining nouns. Instead of those words, we use the て -form to link verbs together in Japanese sentences.

- ドアを閉めて窓を開きます means "I will close the door **and** open the window."
- りんごを食べて水を飲みました means "I ate the apple **and** drank the water."

For the examples above, notice how the て -form is used for the first verb regardless of the tense of the overall sentence. **Only the final verb indicates the tense in this construction.**

He said, she said!

When you are quoting what someone said or telling someone what something is called, you would use the particle ～と. You can think of ～と kind of like quotation marks in English, with the phrase coming before ～と being the phrase that would be in quotes. Since there's no opening quotation mark like there would be with a quote in English, though, you sometimes have to figure out from context which words are being quoted.

Japanese	English
彼はいいえと言いました。	He said "No."

Be careful, because using the wrong particle can sometimes greatly change the meaning of your sentence.

Japanese	English
ジョンと呼んでください。	Please call me "John."

Japanese	English
ジョンを呼んでください。	Please call John.

Counting Long Things

～本 (ほん) is another Japanese counter word, and it is used to count long, cylindrical things like pens and pencils. Be careful, because the pronunciation of ～本 also changes depending on the number before it!

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
一本	いっぽん (ippon)	one (long, cylindrical thing)
二本	にほん (nihon)	two (long, cylindrical things)
三本	さんぽん (sanbon)	three (long, cylindrical things)
四本	よんほん (yonhon)	four (long, cylindrical things)
五本	ごほん (gohon)	five (long, cylindrical things)
六本	ろっぽん (roppon)	six (long, cylindrical things)
七本	ななほん (nanahon)	seven (long, cylindrical things)
八本	はっぽん (happon)	eight (long, cylindrical things)
九本	きゅうほん (kyuuhon)	nine (long, cylindrical things)
十本	じゅっぽん (juppon)	ten (long, cylindrical things)

Past-Tense い-Adjectives

To turn an い-adjective from the present to the past tense, you remove the い-ending and replace with かった. Adding a です at the end will turn it into the polite form. See the example below.

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしいです。	This is delicious.
これはおいしかったです。	This was delicious.

Just like with the other forms of the い-adjectives, you're allowed to drop the です ending in casual conversation.

Sentence	Translation
これはおいしかった。	This was delicious.

Thin and Thick

Just like counter words, different adjectives are sometimes used depending on the objects being described. When you are talking about something being "thin," you would use a different adjective depending on the shape of the object being described.

Japanese	English
細い (ほそい)	thin (for long, cylindrical things)
薄い (うすい)	thin (for flat things)

There are also multiple words meaning "thick," and their usage differs based on the shape of the object being described, too.

Japanese	English
太い (ふとい)	thick (for long, cylindrical things)
厚い (あつい)	thick (for flat things)

Is it thick or is it hot?

Remember, kanji matters! Although the three words below have the same reading, the meaning completely changes if you select the wrong kanji!

Japanese	English
厚い (あつい)	thick (for flat things)
暑い (あつい)	hot (weather)
熱い (あつい)	hot (object)

This lesson introduces the very fundamentals of 敬語・けいご、also known as "respect language," as applied to verbs. Believe it or not, you've already learned some respect

language, such as in the phrases "お元気ですか？" or "おねがいします！" Just like those phrases, the extra-polite constructions we introduce in this chapter also begin with お。

We learned from earlier lessons that the most common way of asking someone to do something is with the て-form, often followed by ください。

Japanese	English
待ってください。	Please wait. (ordinary form)

To make the request extremely humble and polite, we take the stem of the verb from its ～ます form and add an お～ prefix. It's as simple as that. Although you are unlikely to **use** this form on a brief trip to Japan, you are certain to **hear** it from shopkeepers and restaurant employees.

Japanese	English
お待ちください。	Please wait. (ultra-polite form)

Counting Words for Clothing

Below is a table for 足、組 and 着、the counting words introduced in this lesson. 足 is a counter that counts pairs of things you put on your feet, while 組 counts other kinds of pairs, such as pairs of gloves. 着 is a counter for suits, jackets, and kimono.

Number	Form of 足	Form of 組	Form of 着
1・一・いち	一足・いっそく	一組・ひとくみ	一着・いっちやく
2・二・に	二足・にそく	二組・ふたくみ	二着・にちやく
3・三・さん	三足・さんぞく	三組・さんくみ	三着・さんちやく
4・四・よん	四足・よんそく	四組・よんくみ	四着・よんちやく
5・五・ご	五足・ごそく	五組・ごくみ	五着・ごちやく
6・六・ろく	六足・ろくそく	六組・ろっくみ	六着・ろっちやく

Number	Form of 足	Form of 組	Form of 着
7・七・なな	七足・ななそく	七組・ななくみ	七着・ななちゃく
8・八・はち	八足・はっそく	八組・はっくみ	八着・はっちゃく
9・九・きゅう	九足・きゅうそく	九組・きゅうくみ	九着・きゅうちゃく
10・十・じゅう	十足・じゅっそく	十組・じゅっくみ	十着・じゅっちゃく

The Plain Form

We use the "plain," "short" or "dictionary" form first and foremost to express the present or future tense in a casual conversation, such as between friends. We also use it to express these tenses in certain other situations before the end of a sentence.

Without exception, all plain form verbs end in a [u] sound. In the examples below, see how the plain form endings correlate with the construction of the て-form.

English	Kanji	Plain Form	て-Form
eat	食べる	たべる	たべて
give	-	あげる	あげて
read	読む	よむ	よんで
fly	飛ぶ	とぶ	とんで
buy	買う	かう	かって
use	使う	つかう	つかって

Nominalizing Verbs with the Plain Form + の

You can use the construction ～のが好きです to talk about things you like doing. In the example below, およぐ (swim) is the plain form of verb およぎます。When you add の to the plain form, the translation becomes either “to swim” or “swimming”. The sentence ends with ～が好きです、which means "I like."

- Therefore, およぐのが好きです means "I like swimming" or "I like to swim."

Remember that you can add additional information to any sentence to provide more context.

- For example, うみでおよぐのが好きです means "I like swimming in the ocean."

Below is a table of sample sentences that model this construction.

Object	Verb	の	が	Adverb	です
	はしる	の	が	はやい	です
	およぐ	の	が	上手	です
テニスを	する	の	が	下手	です
アニメを	見る	の	が	好き	です

- はしるのがはやいです means "My running is fast" or "I run fast."
- およぐのが上手です means "Your swimming is skilled" or "you are good at swimming."
- テニスをするのが下手です means "My tennis playing is poor" or "I am bad at playing tennis."
- アニメを見るのが好きです means "I like watching anime" or "I like to watch anime."

The Plain Past Form

We use the "plain past" form or "short past" form first and foremost to express the past tense in a casual conversation, such as between friends. We also use it to express the past tense in certain other situations.

This form is constructed by taking the て-form of a verb and replacing with た (if it ends in て) or だ (if it ends in で).

English	Kanji	Plain Form	て-Form	Plain Past
eat	食べる	たべる	たべて	たべた
buy	買う	かう	かって	かった

English	Kanji	Plain Form	て-Form	Plain Past
read	読む	よむ	よんで	よんだ

Just like when we create the て-form, verbs that end in く or ぐ in the plain form have irregular endings.

English	Kanji	Plain Form	て-Form	Plain Past
write	書く	かく	かいて	かいた
swim	泳ぐ	およぐ	およいで	およいだ

I would like...

NOUN+が欲しい and VERB STEM+～たい are two ways to express that you want something. However, Japanese speakers often desire to be less direct, which is considered more polite. You can do that by adding ～のですが or ～んですが to the end of a request to make it less blunt. In English, you can translate sentences containing this ending as "I would like..."

Japanese	English
葉書を送りたいです。	I want to send a postcard.
葉書を送りたいのですが。	I would like to send a postcard.
タクシーを呼んで欲しいです。	I want you to call a taxi.
タクシーを呼んで欲しいんですが。	I would like you to call a taxi.

Maid Cafes?

There are many things you can find in Japan that aren't common in other countries. Want to dress up as your favorite anime character and get your photo taken on the street? Visit a cafe where the waitresses all dress like maids? You can find all that and more in Japan!

Japanese	English	Notes
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Japanese	English	Notes
メイドカフェ	Maid Cafe	In maid cafes, the servers dress up like maids!
オタク	Otaku	The word "otaku" is usually used in English to refer to someone who is obsessed with anime and manga, but the word is used for many other things in Japan. For instance, did you know that a 電車オタク is someone who is obsessed with trains?
コスプレ	Cosplay	"Cosplay" refers to dressing up as characters, usually from anime, manga, or video games. It is short for "costume play."

Ride the Yamanote Line!

There are a lot of interesting and trendy areas in Tokyo, so it can be helpful to know their names if you ever choose to visit.

Japanese	Reading
原宿	はらじゅく
渋谷	しぶや
秋葉原	あきはばら
池袋	いけぶくろ
新宿	しんじゅく

Harajuku and Shibuya are both known for their fashion - Harajuku for street fashion and Shibuya for having many large department stores for shopping! Harajuku is a great place to go if you like to cosplay. Akihabara and Ikebukuro are interesting places for an otaku - you can buy video games, anime and manga, computer parts, and all kinds of other things! And Shinjuku is well-known for its exciting nightlife.

The 山手線 (やまのてせん) or "Yamanote Line" is a train line in Tokyo that goes in a circle, and it makes stops in all the areas listed above. It might be better to avoid riding the train at rush hour, though - otherwise you might run into lots of サラリーマン (office workers) going to and from work, and the train might be too packed for you to get on!

The Olympics!

Are you looking forward to the Olympics? If you are, you can tell people that you are looking forward to something by using the phrase **楽しみにしている** - or **楽しみにしています** if you want to be more polite. What Olympic sport are you looking forward to the most? Who do you hope will win the **金メダル** (gold medal)?

Japanese	English
私はオリンピックを 楽しみにしている!	I am looking forward to the Olympics!

There are several ways of expressing one's ability to do something in Japanese.

Potential Form

The first and more casual way is the potential form of the verb, which changes the usual verb ending into a form that rhymes with **～える** or **～えます**。 Notice how the potential form ending changes in accordance with the original ending.

Regular Forms	Potential "Can-Do" Forms
見る・見ます	見える・見えます
行く・行きます	行ける・行けます
作る・作ります	作れる・作れます
飛ぶ・飛びます	飛べる・飛べます

When using this form, you may notice that the particle **が** plays a major role in describing what would normally be the object of a sentence marked with **を**。 This is because the potential form often translates better to "is able to be" than "can."

Regular Examples	Potential "Can-Do" Examples
本を見る・ look at a book	本 が 見える・ see a book
音楽を聞く・ listen to music	音楽 が 聞こえる・ hear music

Using **できる**

The second and more formal to express ability is with the verb できる、sometimes spelled 出来る。Ordinarily, the short form of a verb attaches to the word ことができる to signify someone's ability to do something.

Regular Examples	ことができる Examples
踊る・ dance	踊ることができる・ can dance
逃げる・ escape	逃げることができる・ can escape

する Verbs

For verbs that end in ~する or ~します、one has no choice but to express ability with できる。The more casual way to do this is with できる by itself.

Regular Examples	~できる Examples
勉強する・ study	勉強できる・ can study
運動する・ exercise	運動できる・ can exercise

To make the form more formal, you can add することができる to the end of the verb instead.

Regular Examples	することができる Examples
勉強する・ study	勉強することができる・ can study
運動する・ exercise	運動することができる・ can exercise

Expressing favors in Japanese makes frequent use of the て-form in coordination with a set of special verbs for giving and receiving.

あげる

We use あげる when we ourselves do a favor for someone else. We also use it when the interaction involves only other people.

Example	Translation
私はあなたに花を買ってあげた。	I bought flowers for you .
本田は田中に花を買ってあげた。	Honda bought flowers for Tanaka.

やる

We use やる when we ourselves do a favor for someone of a lower social status, such as a child or a pet. This also applies when the interaction involves only other people.

Example	Translation
私は娘に花を買ってやった。	I bought flowers for my daughter .
本田は娘に花を買ってやった。	Honda bought flowers for his daughter.

くれる

We use くれる when someone else does a favor for us.

Example	Translation
彼は私に花を買ってくれた。	He bought flowers for me .

もらう

We use もらう when the topic of the sentence is the one to receive the favor, as "もらう" literally means "receive." This is often translated as "had (someone) do (something)."

Example	Translation
私は母に花を買ってもらった。	I had my mother buy (me) flowers.
彼女は彼氏に花を買ってもらった。	She had her boyfriend buy (her) flowers.

いただく

You may recognize the verb **いただく** from the phrase **いただきます**、 which is said before eating. **いただく** is a polite form of **もらう**、 usually used when asking for a favor. In addition to **いただく**、 one can use the verb **くれる** for a more casual tone.

Example	Translation
花を買っていただけませんか？	Would you please buy me flowers?
花を買ってくれませんか？	Would you mind buying me flowers?

Onomatopoeia

The Japanese language features many words that are known as **onomatopoeia** - a word that is named by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it. One of these words is **きらきら**、 which means "sparkling." It is meant to mimic the sound one might imagine a glittering diamond or star might make. **きらきら** can be used as a **-する** verb (**きらきらする**) or paired with the verb **光る** (**きらきら光る**) to further emphasize the sparkle.

In Japanese, onomatopoeia can be commonly written in either hiragana (**きらきら**) or (キラキラ), depending on what you prefer stylistically.

Counting Large Animals

Remember, the counter word **～匹 (ひき)** is used to count small animals. Have you wondered how you would count large animals? You would use the counter word **～頭 (とう)** instead! Thankfully, the kanji is read the same way (**とう**) regardless of the number of large animals you are counting!

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
一頭	いっとう (ittou)	one (large animal)
二頭	にとう (nitou)	two (large animals)
三頭	さんとう (santou)	three (large animals)
四頭	よんとう (yontou)	four (large animals)

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
五頭	ごとう (gotou)	five (large animals)
六頭	ろくとう (rokutou)	six (large animals)
七頭	ななとう (nanatou)	seven (large animals)
八頭	はっとう (hattou)	eight (large animals)
九頭	きゅうとう (kyuutou)	nine (large animals)
十頭	じゅうとう (juttou) or じっとう (jittou)	ten (large animals)

Hardly Any

ほとんど is a word that can be used in a negative sentence to mean “hardly any” or “hardly (at all)” or “almost no...” Below are a few examples of its usage.

Japanese	English
ほとんど信じられなかった。	I could hardly believe it.
日本にはほとんど石油がありません。	There is almost no oil in Japan.

Appearance

When expressing appearance in Japanese, one can choose from several grammatical expressions.

よう

Using the noun よう is the most basic way of expressing something's outward appearance.

Example	Translation
彼はいそがしいようだ。	He looks busy.

みたい

The noun *みたい* is used almost exactly like *よう*, only it has a more casual tone. Be careful not to treat it as a verb or an adjective, although it might look like one.

Example	Translation
古いみたいです。	It looks old.

そう

The noun *そう* is used to express how something seems or appears to be based on one's observation. It's more of an educated guess and less of a certainty than *よう* or *みたい*.

そう is also used to describe hearsay gathered from other people. In this instance, the grammar of the word changes slightly. Verbs, for example, change from the stem form for appearance to the short form for hearsay.

Example	Translation
雨が降りそうです。	It seems like it will rain.
雨が降るそうです。	I hear that it will rain.

らしい

With respect to hearsay, *らしい* is used in similar contexts as *そう*, only it acts like any other *い*-adjective would.

Example	Translation
あの映画は楽しいらしい。	I hear that movie is fun.

Degree

This lesson also introduces the concept of nouns formed from adjectives, much like how "sweet" becomes "sweetness" in English with an additional ending. The ability or inability to measure such nouns in Japanese plays an important role in how they are formed.

～さ

If a quality can be measured objectively, its nominal form will end in さ。 This is also the case for all な-adjectives, regardless of one's ability to measure them.

Adjective	Noun
大きい・ big	大きさ・ size
長い・ long	長さ・ length
高い・ tall	高さ・ height
重い・ heavy	重さ・ weight
便利・ convenient	便利さ・ convenience
きれい・ pretty	きれいさ・ prettiness

～み

If, however, a quality cannot be measured objectively, its nominal form will almost always end in み、 especially if it is a feeling or flavor.

Adjective	Noun
痛い・ painful	痛み・ pain
悲しい・ sad	悲しみ・ sadness
甘い・ sweet	甘み・ sweetness
うまい・ tasty	うまみ・ tastiness

In Japanese, there are **four different expressions** that translate to the English word "if."

と - Natural Consequence

We use the word と when something is a natural, inevitable, and predictable consequence of something else. This cannot be a personal intention. It is often used when describing facts and operations, instructions, and habitual actions.

Example	Translation
タイヤは古いと、危ないです。	If tires are old, they are dangerous.

なら - Future Speculation

We use **なら** when expressing that something will take effect in a certain context. This is often a personal intention about the future based on a given assumption about what will happen.

Example	Translation
みんなが行くなら、私も行く。	If everyone is going, I will go as well.

ば - Conditional Focus

We can use the **ば** form of a verb to express a conditional sentence in almost any context. However, it is **ungrammatical** to use this construction when the subject is the same in both parts of the sentence **and** the sentence expresses a desire or prohibition. It places a special focus on what comes **before** it, and the outcome is usually **good**. The **ば** form sounds rather **formal**, so it's often used for **writing** and **polite speech**.

Example	Translation
この薬を飲めば、よくなりますよ。	If you take this medicine, you will get better.

たら・だら - Consequence Focus

The use of **たら** or **だら** to end a past-tense verb presents the fewest restrictions and greatest freedom for expressing a conditional sentence in Japanese. It is often used for hypotheticals and speculations that have yet to be proven, much like the construction "if ... would ..." in English. It places a special focus on what comes **after** it. **This is the only construction that is grammatical for a past event**, or when the subject is the same in both parts of the sentence and the sentence expresses a desire or prohibition. Please refer to the example sentences below.

Example	Translation
食べすぎたら、気持ち悪くなりました。	I got sick when I ate too much.

Example	Translation
お酒を飲んだら、自転車に乗ってはいけません。	You must not ride your bike if you drink alcohol.

When in doubt about which form of "if" to use, **たら** or **だら** is usually a safe bet.

もし - Conditional Warning

The word **もし** cannot express "if" by itself. Rather, it is a supplemental word generally used at the beginning of a sentence to express that a conditional is coming. It generates a backdrop of uncertainty about the information ahead.

Example	Translation
もし時間がないなら、明日でもいい。	Supposing you do not have time, tomorrow would also be alright.

How to measure?

In Japanese, similar words often use different kanji characters in order to express different nuance. For instance, the character for “to measure” differs depending on the thing you’re measuring! All the words below are read **はかる** and all of them mean “to measure,” but the situations in which you would use each are different.

Japanese	English
量る	to measure (weight or volume)
計る	to measure (quantities, time, temperature)
測る	to measure (length, depth, width, speed)

～さ

If a quality can be measured objectively, its nominal form will end in **さ**。 This is also the case for all **な**-adjectives, regardless of one's ability to measure them.

Adjective	Noun
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Adjective	Noun
大きい・ big	大きさ・ size
長い・ long	長さ・ length
高い・ tall	高さ・ height
重い・ heavy	重さ・ weight
便利・ convenient	便利さ・ convenience
きれい・ pretty	きれいさ・ prettiness

Transitive and Intransitive Verb Pairs

Remember, **transitive verbs** are verbs that take a direct object, while **intransitive verbs** are verbs that do not take a direct object. Transitive and intransitive verbs often occur in pairs, and their meaning and usage differs.

Japanese	English
起こる (おこる)	take place, occur (intransitive)
起こす (おこす)	cause (transitive)

Remember that the particle **を** is used to mark the direct object of a sentence, so you would always use it with a transitive verb.

Japanese	English
事故は起こった。	An accident occurred .
事故をを起こした。	I caused an accident.

As...as possible

できるだけ is a phrase meaning “as much as possible” or “as much as one can.” Depending on the subject of the sentence, the exact translation of the phrase can change, however.

Japanese	English
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Japanese	English
できるだけ早くここへ来てください。	Please come here as soon as you can .
彼はできるだけ速く走りました。	He ran as fast as he could .
私はできるだけ多くの時間が必要です。	I need as much time as possible .

Only

There are two ways to express the idea of “only” or “just” in Japanese. One of them is with the word **だけ**, which is used with affirmative sentences.

Japanese	English
百円 だけ あげます。	I will give you only a hundred yen.
見ている だけ です。	I am just looking.

Another way you can express this idea is with the word **しか**, which has the same meaning but is used with **negative** sentences in Japanese, although the meaning of the sentence is not translated in the negative.

Japanese	English
この部屋には田中さん しか いません。	Only Mrs. Tanaka is in this room.
日本語の辞書を一冊 しか 持っていない。	I have only one Japanese dictionary.

Several

数～ (すう～) is a prefix that can be added to some words to mean “several....” or “a few...” Some examples are below.

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
数人	すうにん	a few people, several people
数年	すうねん	a few years, several years
数回	すうかい	a few times, several times

Transitive and Intransitive Verb Pairs

The English language has certain sets of verbs that are related to each other but behave differently in a sentence. **Transitive verbs** like "raise" or "lay" always take a grammatical object. However, **intransitive verbs** like "rise" or "lie" never do. The same principle works in Japanese, with the examples below.

Transitive Verbs (take an object)

Japanese	English
上げる・あげる	raise (something)
下げる・さげる	lower (something)

Intransitive Verbs (no object)

Japanese	English
上がる・あがる	rise
下がる・さがる	fall

So how do you know if and when a verb is **transitive** or **intransitive** in Japanese? Aside from noticing which verbs do and do not take grammatical objects, there are a few spelling patterns that can act as clues.

- **Transitive** verbs often end in え-sounds or す、like the verbs 始める (はじめる)、決める (きめる)、or 出す (だす)。
- Their **intransitive** pairings often end in あ-sounds, like the verbs 始まる (はじまる) or 決まる (きまる)。

Greetings at Work

Greetings and set phrases are an extremely important part of Japanese work culture. Below is a sampling of some of the most important points.

Phrase	Occasion
おはようございます	A standard morning greeting, occasionally shorted to ございます、ます、or simply a loud hiss.
お疲れ様です・おつかれさまです	A mid-day greeting to acknowledge that someone is doing such a good job that they look tired from doing

Phrase	Occasion
	so.
失礼します・しつれいします	A routine apology said when entering or leaving a room.
お先に失礼します・おさきにしつれいします	A routine apology said when leaving work before other people do so.
お疲れ様でした・おつかれさまでした	A routine response to "お先に失礼します", acknowledging that the coworker's hard work has been appreciated.

Only

There are two ways to express the idea of “only” or “just” in Japanese. One of them is with the word **だけ**, which is used with affirmative sentences.

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百円 だけ あげます。	I will give you only a hundred yen.
見ている だけ です。	I am just looking.

Another way you can express this idea is with the word **しか**, which has the same meaning but is used with **negative** sentences in Japanese, although the meaning of the sentence is not translated in the negative.

Japanese	English
この部屋には田中さん しか いません。	Only Mrs. Tanaka is in this room.
日本語の辞書を一冊 しか 持っていない。	I have only one Japanese dictionary.

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数～(すう～) is a prefix that can be added to some words to mean “several....” or “a few...” Some examples are below.

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
数人	すうにん	a few people, several people

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
数年	すうねん	a few years, several years
数回	すうかい	a few times, several times

In order to...

The phrase **のに** has many different uses in Japanese. One of the meanings is “in order to (perform an action).” In this construction “A **のに** B” would be “I did B in order to A,” in which **のに** follows a verb in the short form. Some examples are listed below.

Japanese	English
父は新聞を読む のに 眼鏡を掛けました。	My father put on his glasses in order to read the newspaper.
この島へ来る のに 飛行機を二回乗り換えた。	I transferred planes twice to come to this island.

Obligations

Two grammatical elements in Japanese are especially important when describing responsibility and expectation.

～はず

The noun **はず** describes the way something is expected to be.

Example	Translation
医者は医学を勉強する はず だ。	Doctors are supposed to study medicine.

～べき

The noun **べき**、 however, describes responsibilities and obligations with a more moralistic bent.

Example	Translation
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Example	Translation
学校に行くべきです。	I should go to school.

Because **べき** can come across as harsh, it is most often used to describe one's own obligations. For talking about other people, "**ほうがいい**" is often used instead.

Example	Translation
学校に行ったほうがいい。	You should go to school.

Causative Form

The causative form is used to express the fact when someone lets or forces someone to do something. It is created by adding a form of **～あせる** or **～あせます** to the end of a verb stem. When the person who is requested to perform the action is followed by **に**, this usually translates to "let someone do something."

Example	Translation
彼らは彼にアメリカへ行かせた。	They let him go to the US.

When this person is followed by **を**, however, this usually implies that the person had no choice in the matter.

Example	Translation
彼らは彼をアメリカへ行かせた。	They made him go to the US.

This distinction is not a hard-and-fast rule, however, and the context of the sentence is usually enough to determine the difference. Either English translation is possible for either of the Japanese sentences above.

Sentence-Ending Particles **な** and **なあ**

Oftentimes when you want to express your positive emotions in Japanese, you end the sentence with either **な** or **なあ**, with the latter expressing an even deeper sense of longing for something. This particle does not translate directly into English, but it often

acts similarly to the previously-introduced particle *ね*, which establishes a "harmony of understanding" between the speaker and listener.

Example	Translation	Emotional Depth
いいね。	Isn't that nice!	neutral
いいな。	Isn't that nice!	medium
いいなあ。	Isn't that nice!	high

Volitional Form

This course introduced the polite phrase *~ましょう* relatively early on. This usually translates to "let's ... " but not always. If the speaker is referring to an action that is intended to be done alone, it translates better as "I will," a kind of definitive affirmation of one's desire to do something.

Example	Translation
私は銀行に行きましょう。	I will go to the bank.

This lesson introduces the casual form of *~ましょう*, which is some iteration of *~おう* or *~よう* depending on the ending of the verb in question.

Example	Translation
私は銀行に行こう。	I will go to the bank.
ピザを食べよう。	Let's eat pizza.
外であそぼう。	Let's play outside.

Talking and Thinking About Something

N+について is a phrase used in Japanese to discuss a topic being talked or thought about. It can be translated as "regarding...." or "about..."

Japanese	English
この問題について話しました。	I talked about this problem.

Japanese	English
これについて考える必要がある。	I need to think about this.

As Expected

～通り (とおり) is a phrase used in Japanese to express that something is “as expected.” It can be used following a verb (usually in the short form past tense) or a noun. Directly following a noun, the pronunciation sometimes changes to どおり, such as in the phrase 約束通り (やくそくどおり), which means “as promised.”

Japanese	English
教えた通りやりなさい。	Do as I taught you.
約束通りに宿題をした。	I did my homework as promised.

Cities and Prefectures

Japan is divided into different areas, which are known as “prefectures.” Most of these areas will be identified by adding the character 県 (けん) to the end of the area’s name. For instance, if you lived in Yamaguchi prefecture, you would tell people you live in 山口県 (やまぐちけん).

If you’re talking about a city, you would usually add the character 市 (し) to the end of the place name. So if you lived in Chiba City, you would tell people you live in 千葉市 (ちばし).

Did you know that sometimes a prefecture will contain a city of the same name? So if you live in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, you would live in both 千葉県(ちばけん) and 千葉市 (ちばし)!

As a...

When discussing someone's role, you can use the word **として** in Japanese. The word **として** comes after the noun or "role" that is being discussed. In English, it's often translated to the word "as."

Japanese	English
友達として私は意見を言いました。	I said my opinion as a friend.
山口さんは地元の高校で先生として働いています。	Mr. Yamaguchi is working as a teacher at a local high school.

Passive Voice

The passive voice in Japanese is a verb form that is unique to each verb ending, yet it is always some iteration of **～られる** or **～られます**.

Active Voice	Passive Voice
食べる・食べます	食べられる・食べられます
言う・言います	言われる・言われます
読む・読みます	読まれる・読まれます

Remember that the topic or subject of a passive sentence is the recipient of the given action, and as such, it takes the **は** or **が** particle instead of **を**.

Example	Translation
りんごは食べられた	The apple was eaten.

When the passive sentence includes a causative agent, this person or thing is marked with **に**.

Example	Translation
りんごは私に食べられた	The apple was eaten by me.

It just happened!

When you are describing an event that *just* occurred, you can use the phrase ～ところ. The phrase follows directly after a verb in the short form. If the verb is in the non-past tense, it describes an action that is just about to happen. If the verb is in the past tense, it describes an event that just happened.

Japanese	English
電車は出たところだ。	The train just left.
映画を見に行くところだった。	I was about to go to the movies.

Formal Language

This lesson showcases some of the most common instances of formal language for use in business situations.

Nouns

To make a noun extra formal, one places an お～ prefix before a word of Japanese origin (typically a word with a single kanji) and a ご～ prefix before a word of Chinese origin (typically a word with two kanji). We already learned a few examples earlier in the course.

Ordinary	Formal
水 (みず)	お水
箸 (はし)	お箸
両親 (りょうしん)	ご両親
主人 (しゅじん)	ご主人
迷惑 (めいわく)	ご迷惑

Sometimes a noun will change completely in the transition from ordinary to formal language, often reflecting a parallel change in another part of speech, such as a verb.

Ordinary	Formal
今日 (きょう)	本日 (ほんじつ)
言い訳 (いいわけ)	申し訳 (もうしわけ)

Adjectives

Adjectives typically do not change grammatical form in formal speech, but they are replaced with more formal varieties.

Ordinary	Formal
良い (いい・よい)	宜しい (よろしい)

Verbs

For verbs, there is a mixed system. As introduced in an earlier lesson, some verbs adopt an お～ prefix and may adopt the use of the copula です。

Ordinary	Formal
入りますか？	お入りですか？
待ってください。	お待ちください。

Meanwhile, some verbs are replaced with more formal variants.

Ordinary	Formal
する	致します (いたします) (one's own actions)
する	なさいます (someone else's actions)
ある	ございます
もらう	いただきます
くれる	くださいます
行く・来る	いらっしゃいます

Ordinary	Formal
言う	申します (もうします)
だ・です	である (written form)
だ・です	でございます (spoken form)
食べる	召し上がります (めしあがります)

Remember that formal language uses the polite ~ます form at the end of each sentence. Ending a formal sentence with the plain form, **だ** or **だろう** sounds odd and incongruous with the context.

An Overnight Stay

When you're staying overnight somewhere, you would use the counter word 泊 (はく) to count the number of nights you stay somewhere. Please take note that some of the readings are irregular!

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
一泊	いっぱく (ippaku)	one (night of a stay)
二泊	にぱく (nihaku)	two (nights of a stay)
三泊	さんぱく (sanpaku)	three (nights of a stay)
四泊	よんぱく (yonhaku)	four (nights of a stay)
五泊	ごぱく (gohaku)	five (nights of a stay)
六泊	ろっぱく (roppaku)	six (nights of a stay)
七泊	ななぱく (nanahaku)	seven (nights of a stay)
八泊	はっぱく (happaku)	eight (nights of a stay)
九泊	きゅうぱく (kyuuhaku)	nine (nights of a stay)
十泊	じゅっぱく (juppaku)	ten (nights of a stay)

Below are some example sentences.

Japanese	English
名古屋で三泊した。	I spent three nights in Nagoya.
このホテルは一泊四万円です。	This hotel is forty thousand yen for one night .

In a certain place...

You can use the word ある before a noun to specify that you're talking about a *certain* thing without going into specifics about it.

Japanese	English
彼はあるホテルに泊まりました。	He stayed at a certain hotel.
私は貴重品をいつもある所にしまっている。	I always keep my valuables in a certain place.

Counting Large Animals

Remember, the counter word ～匹 (ひき) is used to count small animals. Have you wondered how you would count large animals? You would use the counter word ～頭 (とう) instead! Thankfully, the kanji is read the same way (とう) regardless of the number of large animals you are counting!

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
一頭	いっとう (ittou)	one (large animal)
二頭	にとう (nitou)	two (large animals)
三頭	さんとう (santou)	three (large animals)
四頭	よんとう (yontou)	four (large animals)
五頭	ごとう (gotou)	five (large animals)
六頭	ろくとう (rokutou)	six (large animals)

Kanji	Reading	Meaning
七頭	ななとう (nanatou)	seven (large animals)
八頭	はっとう (hattou)	eight (large animals)
九頭	きゅうとう (kyuutou)	nine (large animals)
十頭	じゅっとう (juttou) or じっとう (jittou)	ten (large animals)

Hardly Any

ほとんど is a word that can be used in a negative sentence to mean “hardly any” or “hardly (at all)” or “almost no...” Below are a few examples of its usage.

Japanese	English
ほとんど信じられなかった。	I could hardly believe it.
日本にはほとんど石油がありません。	There is almost no oil in Japan.

Casual Language

Welcome to the casual language in the Japanese course! The reason that colloquial language is listed late in the tree is that we wanted you to understand the importance of politeness when speaking with strangers or coworkers.

When you speak with friends in casual settings or watch anime, you may hear a lot of expressions that you have yet to be introduced to.

Pronouns

There are two male pronouns reserved for casual settings, 俺 (おれ), meaning "I" or "me," and お前 (おまえ) meaning "you." In formal settings, use of these pronouns is considered confrontational and impolite. Both 俺 and お前 sound extremely rough and masculine, which is why typically they are reserved for boys or men who are teenagers or older.

In addition, you may hear women and girls use the pronoun *あたし* (sometimes written *私*) to refer to themselves. This is not considered as polite as *わたし*, but considerably more so than *俺*.

Particle Dropping

In polite and written Japanese, grammatical particles that mark parts of speech, such as *は* and *が*, see heavy use. However, in more casual settings, they are often dropped when the meaning is clear without them. In Japanese just as in English, formality and sentence length go hand-in-hand.

Formal	Casual
あなたは今どこですか？	今、どこ？
あの方はどなたですか？	彼、誰？
それでは、行きましょう。	よし、行こう。

I didn't mean to!

When you've done something unintentionally, you can use the word *つい* to emphasize the fact that it was an accident. It's often paired with the *V+てしまう* form, and it's generally used to express regret over having done something you know you shouldn't have done.

Japanese	English
友達と話していてもついスマホを見てしまう。	Even when I am talking with my friends, I wind up looking at my smartphone unintentionally .

This sentence has a connotation of something like, "I wind up looking at my smartphone (even though I know that I shouldn't)."

You can also use the word *うっかり* to express that you've done something carelessly or accidentally.

Japanese	English
うっかりエアコンを消し忘れた。	I carelessly forgot to turn off the air conditioner.

女 and 男

In this skill, you'll encounter words about men and women and boys and girls, and you'll see some different expressions you might use to talk about them. The word for woman is 女 (おんな) and the word for man is 男 (おとこ), but it is more polite to use the expressions 女の人 (おんなのひと) and 男の人 (おとこのひと) instead. There are also the expressions 女の子 (おんなのこ) and 男の子 (おとこのこ) which mean "girl" and "boy" respectively. Did you notice that the polite expressions for "man" and "woman" use the character for "person" - 人 (ひと) - while the expressions for "boy" and "girl" use the character for "child" - 子 (こ)?

Japanese	Reading	English
女	おんな	woman
男	おとこ	man
女の人	おんなのひと	woman (more polite)
男の人	おとこのひと	man (more polite)
女の子	おんなのこ	girl
男の子	おとこのこ	boy

Death

Much like English, Japanese has more than one way to talk about death. The different words have different connotations, similar to the English language expressions "died" and "passed away."

Japanese	Reading	English
死にました	しにました	died
亡くなりました	なくなりました	passed away

Did you know that Japan has four seasons?

Many who have visited Japan have been asked this question, and for good reason. Unlike in many parts of the world, the four seasons in Japan are quite distinct and a core part of Japanese culture. The cyclical nature of the year has been celebrated on the archipelago for millennia with festivals, rituals, and seasonal food.

Spring is the traditional start of the year, a time of new beginnings, a new school year, and a new year on the business calendar. Cherry blossoms bloom throughout Japan to mark the transition into spring. Families and friends gather underneath the blossoming trees and have picnics with rice dumplings (団子・だんご) and various beverages.

Summer is remarkably hot and humid throughout Japan, especially in areas away from the mountains or the sea. Summer festivals offer a respite from the heat with flavored shaved ice (かき氷・かきごおり) and cool drinks. Near the end of summer, many in Japan return to their hometowns to celebrate the Bon Festival, a holiday to commemorate the spirits of one's ancestors.

Autumn is the season when the maple leaves turn a colorful spectrum of red, orange, and gold. The weather cools down, and the true bounty of the harvest takes the form of the many delicacies available at this time, including baked sweet potato and a warming, broth-based stew (おでん).

Winter is the season for heavy snow in the mountains of central Japan and throughout the north and northwest of the country. On New Years, Japanese people traditionally eat long buckwheat noodles (そば) as a wish for future health and longevity. Department stores celebrate the new year with mystery grab bags. Sapporo holds its annual snow festival in February, complete with enormous sculptures that attract visitors from around the world.