

Japanese is Possible!

Lesson 1

Welcome!

Chances are that if you're looking at this page right now, you've thought at one point in your life, "y'know, it would probably be fun to know Japanese, but how?" Undoubtedly, it sure looks like a formidable task, what with all of its confusing-looking writing and its reputation for having a most unusual sentence structure. Well have no fear. If you really want to learn Japanese, these lessons can give you a push in the right direction. If you're not already convinced that it's a good idea, here are:

Nine great reasons to study Japanese!

Reason #1

Spoken by over 130 million people, Japanese is the among the top 10 languages on Earth.

Reason #2

In the world of console video games/anime, it rises to 1st place. Most console games (Playstation, Nintendo, Game Boy) are released nearly a year earlier than they are in the USA, if they are released here at all.

Reason #3

Even today, Japanese voice actors tend to put more soul and realism into their Anime roles than their American counterparts (not to anger any dub fans out there). Wouldn't it be nice to have the best of both worlds? Good (Japanese) voice acting without having to read your Anime!

Reason #4

There are a LOT of anime series (and video games) out there in Japanese only. Some good titles too! It would be nice to be able to understand them.

Reason #5

Many of your family, friends, classmates and/or co-workers believe Japanese is hard. Show them what you can do! They'll think you have special talent.

Actually, anyone can learn it if they want to, but people have a way of being really impressed about somebody approaching the Japanese language. I say this from experience.

Reason #6 "Speaks Japanese" looks great on a resume, no matter what your line of work. Knowing any second language helps, but Japanese will have a greater effect on an employer, since not many Americans know it. (which can't be said for Spanish, for example)

Reason #7

Japan has the second largest economy in the world, so their language is very relevant.

Reason #8

Japan has a fascinating culture, much of which is reflected in its language.

Reason #9

Japan controls both the video game and Anime industries. This allows you to learn a language while enjoying an Anime or playing a video game! What other language gives you such opportunities?

Reason #10

Japan has a lot great music. It's very enjoyable to listen to it, but to hear it and actually know what's being said is an even better experience.

Ok, there was a bit of a trend in most of those reasons, but learning Japanese is a great idea even if you're not a hardcore anime fan (as I personally am not).

How will you teach me Japanese?

This is the first in a long line of lessons that you will find here on Maktos. A number of them were written years ago and are currently being revised, so you will see those arriving bit by bit in the coming weeks. In the long term, I plan to extend the lessons in this site beyond what has currently been written. So visit often, updates are popping up all the time.

I will start at the very beginning, assuming that you know nothing about Japanese right now. All you need is the desire to learn it, and I'll help with the rest!

Here are some of the many areas I will cover:

- Getting started
- Getting and staying motivated
- Getting the books you need
- Learning the spoken language
- Learning the written language (when the time comes)
- Learning Japanese on a tight budget
- Finding Japanese language resources on the vast Internet
- Getting free Japanese word processor software
- Getting a really good computer dictionary - for free
- Using many different resources, to make learning Japanese fun
- Finding things you can do - easily - to speed up the process
- Finding the best way for you learn

4 MYTHS about Japanese:

1. "Japanese is hard"

After much study and talking to several people, I must say that Japanese is not "hard" or "complex", but "different". It's true that it is very different from English or Spanish. However, the grammar, spelling, etc. is very straightforward. Making sentences in the language, conversing, etc. can occur very early on. The pronunciation is very close to Spanish, although the accent is different.

2. "You need to learn all those difficult symbols"

Those "difficult symbols" are the Kanji, borrowed from the Chinese. There are 1900 Kanji in daily use in Japan. While it is true that the Kanji are probably the most difficult part of Japanese, you can ignore them for quite a while and still enjoy the rest of the language. I will teach many of the beginning lessons in roman characters, so you will have nothing new to learn as far as reading the lessons. I will slowly make the transition to phonetic characters and perhaps in the distant future, I will teach you some Kanji.

To be able to write any word in Japanese, all you need to know are the 2 phonetic systems, "Hiragana" and "Katakana". They only have 46 letters each, and can be learned very easily in a matter of weeks. Plus, once you know how something is pronounced in one word, you know it for any word. It's completely phonetic. Don't you wish English was that way!

3. **"I don't have time to learn it!"**

This is a common reason why many people aren't bilingual in Japanese right now. If you don't have a goal in mind, or guidance, you won't notice how much time is spent doing nothing.

If you take a look at your average day from an objective standpoint, you'll find many wasted hours and minutes. Look how much time is spent waiting. Waiting in line, waiting for someone to show up, waiting for the commercials to end, waiting for the movie to start, etc. That wasted time can be used constructively to inch you toward your goal of learning Japanese!

4. **"You have to learn Japanese in a formal classroom environment"**

That is pretty easily shot down. I learned Japanese for three years before ever setting foot in a classroom (to learn Japanese, that is). When I finally had the opportunity to take Japanese classes, I placed into a Second-Year Japanese course in an Ivy League school. I've met people who took French and Spanish for three or four years in high school and couldn't place into their respective Second-Year courses. In other words, you don't need a classroom to learn Japanese, you just need to utilize your resources.

Taking a class works for many people. I know it has helped me. I certainly recommend taking a class if you have the opportunity in addition to following this column. You DON'T have to take a class to keep up with this column, though.

What is a classroom? A place of opportunity where you can learn. There are people who go to class and don't learn, and some that seize the opportunity. There are also people that master whole fields of knowledge without going to a classroom. A classroom is just one of the many ways to learn.

Join us in the next lesson, where we give you some useful resources for your study of the Japanese language.

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