

Japanese is Possible!

## Lesson 10

# Part 10

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## The Role JIP Plays

Because everyone is different, each person requires a different method to learn the same exact thing. That's why there are so many different Japanese books out there right now. Some books are "survival guides" teaching you only a few common phrases, such as how to order food and ask where the restroom is. Other books insist you learn the written language (Hiragana/Katakana) right away. Many books stress the polite form, and never touch on the plain, everyday form of the language.

JIP, on the other hand, wishes to guide you to a practical understanding of the language. After studying for several months, you should be able to understand many phrases commonly spoken in Anime and video games. You should also be able to make Japanese sentences of your own, and converse with Japanese people and other learners by e-mail, letters, and eventually, through speech.

JIP will gain new lessons at a moderate speed. However, it doesn't matter where you are progress-wise. If you just discovered the column recently, you can read the past lessons. They will be here as long as any of the lessons. If you want to learn more than I'm teaching here, you're welcome to go off on your own and find books and other materials to study. A good place to start for this is the [book recommendation](#) page. You can use JIP for additional study material, and also as a source of advice.

## Be Creative!

What's your subject of expertise? I'm sure you have some

interest or hobby where you really know your stuff. How did you become that knowledgeable? Did you get a lot of hands-on experience? Did you learn about it because you were involved in your hobby almost every day?

Since everyone IS different, I have to rely a bit on YOU to come up with the best way to make YOU fluent in Japanese. I can think up some good ways to help ME learn, but only YOU know what kind of techniques worked for you in the past. Some people like to take it easy, others like to push themselves harder and harder. Some people have to make it "fun" somehow or they lose interest. Others have to have a friend or sibling to work with.

A good way to go over what you've learned is to try to construct your own Japanese sentences. I used to have a teacher who would make us create a sentence completely from scratch for every grammatical construction we learned. Do this yourself. Make sentences. Be creative. They can be something that you think would be useful to know off the top of your head or they can be something silly. The sillier it is, the more likely you are to remember it. If you want to be sure that you're doing it right, post your sentences up on the JIP forum. There are plenty of people who would be glad to help you out.

## Four Important Points

I will give several tips here that apply to most people. Try to brainstorm how you can apply these to your particular learning style. When it comes to things like learning, review, practice, etc. I'd say the possibilities are limited only by your imagination - which is endless.

### Tip 1 - Set Goals

Everyone has to have goals, otherwise we are just drifting through life waiting to die! It's no different in Japanese. Unless you have well crafted short- and long-range goals, you won't get very far in anything.

A good long-range goal would be "To be able to speak and understand Japanese". You can take as long as 5 to 7 years to reach your long-range goal. It is your ultimate objective. You aren't supposed to worry about it on a day-to-day basis -- it is there for motivation. Whenever you're having any kind of trouble, just keep your goal in mind. You can work through obstacles when you have a goal. That's because you see obstacles for what they are - something to overcome! If you don't have a goal, you meet your first obstacle and take it as an excuse to quit. Everyone runs into obstacles. The road to success is littered with obstacles.

Sometimes the long-term goal seems unreachable. That's where short-term goals come in. These are the small "milestones" on the way to your long-term goal. Some good short-term goals

include:

- Learning the hiragana alphabet
- Memorizing my latest word list
- Learning 10 new kanji

You will set a large number of short-term goals. When you go on a vacation, you have a destination in mind. However, you can't just get in the car and say "Let's go to Vegas" and start driving. Even if you think about your destination constantly, you won't make it there. You need to get out some maps and plan out how far you will travel each day. You decide which highways you will take, and how often you'll have to stop for fuel and food.

The short-term goals help encourage you. You look behind you, and see a series of goals you have reached. You feel like you're making forward progress, and it encourages you toward your ultimate goal. It gives you the feeling of momentum. Remember, momentum is important indeed when you run into an obstacle!

## Tip 2 - Use It (or Lose It)

I've talked with many people about the topic of learning a second language. Many people reached a decent level of proficiency at Spanish or French in high school, only to become seriously "rusty" years later. My own Spanish teacher once recounted an anecdote about a boy to whom he had taught English. Years later, he saw the boy in a store and said "¡Jorge como est • " But the boy could no longer speak Spanish, *his own native language* because he hadn't used it. People always seem to give the same reason - "I never used it after high school". Now, if you're in the United States, there are really only 2 major languages widely spoken - English and Spanish. The other languages are tossed into the "other" category. Don't misunderstand me, I understand that many other languages are spoken. However, it is challenging to find places where other languages are spoken.

How do you practice Japanese in a country with very few native speakers? It turns out there are several places you can hear Japanese in action, and there are even ways to practice speaking it.

## Where to listen to Japanese

- J-pop and Anime music
- Anime
- Movies/"Doramas" (dramas)
- CD dramas
- Video games

All of the above sources give you an idea of how Japanese is ACTUALLY spoken - and you'll notice they use the "plain" form 8 times out of 10.

## How can I practice speaking Japanese?

I recommend convincing one (or more) siblings and/or friends to join you on your Japanese adventure. It will be of great benefit to both of you. See "JIP Part 1" for a list of reasons why learning Japanese is a good idea. Print it out and give it to them! If you have a younger sibling (under the age of 7) you'll have an easy time convincing them.

Don't be afraid to mess up. You need to practice, and you must use your skills often if you want to make them a part of you. That's why kids learn so quickly - they just dive in and don't worry about how hard it's supposed to be. They don't worry about what it sounds like to a native English speaker, or anything like that. They don't set limits on how much they can learn each day.

If all else fails, try chatting with Japanese people on the Internet. There are several places you can go:

Wbs.net

MSN chat rooms support Japanese text and there are hundreds of Japanese rooms

You might want to check out the Japanese newsgroups, which all begin with "japan" or "fj". There are hundreds of them. I'm sure you'll find several Japanese people to chat with. Many will want to practice their English with you! Often you will talk in Japanese to them, and they'll talk English to you. Other times, you both talk Japanese. It depends on the person! Japanese people are very forgiving when it comes to Americans speaking their language. In America, we make fun of people that can't speak English perfectly. However, Japanese people are not that rude. On the contrary, they consider English to be "exotic" and "cool". They all have taken it in high school, but few become proficient enough to speak it.

### Tip 3 - Practice Speaking It

Try to practice throughout the day. I like to speak Japanese all the time, if only to myself. When I'm looking for my shoes, it's too boring to say "Where are my shoes?". I'll say it in Japanese instead, "kutsu wa doko ni aru?" It makes Japanese seem more like a familiar language. Even though I know the words in that sentence like the back of my hand, it still helps to be using "Japanese" that often. After several months, Japanese seems very "friendly", even though there are still words and sentences I don't understand.

Without going too deep into the topic of how kids learn, (a very fascinating topic that I could talk about all day) I will just say one thing. You want to TRY to be as childlike as possible when learning a language. Yes, your brain isn't as "absorbent" as it was at the age of 5, but look at the bright side! You would have a much harder time if you waited until age 60 to start! Try to

rekindle the love of learning that all kids have.

I started learning Japanese when I was 15. I was decent in Spanish back in high school, but I don't come from a bilingual family or anything. I've worked hard to learn Japanese for about 4 years, and I've almost reached my long-term goal of understanding Japanese. When I first started, I was totally on my own; I didn't know how to teach myself a language. I made a lot of mistakes. Sometimes I picked random words out of a dictionary to learn, etc. I probably wasted a lot of time.

I've concluded it's possible to become proficient at Japanese, even if you don't start when you're 3. However, you really need to "beat it" into your head. You have to use it **OFTEN**, even if only for a couple minutes. A day shouldn't pass where you don't study Japanese for at least 5 minutes. Some days you need to spend more than that.

## **Tip 4 - It's All in your Mind**

The concepts of "hard" and "easy" are all in your mind. For example, just look at the home PC. Modern computers are pretty easy to learn how to use nowadays. However, many older people believe they're "hard". If they could somehow convince themselves that computers are no big deal, they could learn them with no problem. Sure enough, the older folks you see on PCs have overcome that mental block. I know people as young as 45 that are afraid of PCs! The interesting thing is, it's the same PC that 8 year olds use with ease. It has nothing to do with age though - it has to do with frame of mind. Little kids no reason to fear a PC. No one told them computers were "hard" before they first used one.

Some of you may have heard of a famous music teacher from Japan by the name of Suzuki. He has groups of 5 and 6 year olds playing Mozart and other "difficult" works on the violin. Here is how he does it: While giving the mother violin lessons, he places a small violin in the child's playpen. The child watches his mom play her violin, and as soon as he's able, he tries to play his as well. He develops an ear for music, and before long he's able to play music without using a sheet (playing by ear). The lessons only last about an hour, but over a period of years the child develops quite a skill in playing the violin. The idea is to teach a child something before they can learn the conventional "wisdom" that certain things are hard to do.

## **The -te form**

Right now, I am going to teach you a very simple verb form called the -te form. It's sort of like the gerund in English (the -ing form), but it's very often quite different. The easiest way to form the -te form is to remove the final a from the past tense of a verb and replace it with an e. Eventually, you should get so used to forming the -te form that you can forget about the past tense as

an intermediary. Don't bother trying to use this verb form yet. I'm sure you won't get it right, but we'll start to introduce ways to use it in the next lesson.

Let's look at some examples of forming the -te form:

**Dictionary form -> Past -> -te form**

**kau -> katta -> katte (to buy)**

**kaku -> kaita -> kaite (to write)**

**isogu -> isoida -> isoide (to hurry)**

**kasu -> kashita -> kashite (to lend)**

**utsu -> utta -> utte (to strike)**

**shinu -> shinda -> shinde (to die)**

**asobu -> asonda -> asonde (to play)**

**yomu -> yonda -> yonde (to read)**

**kiru -> kitta -> kitte (to cut)**

**taberu -> tabeta -> tabete (to eat)**

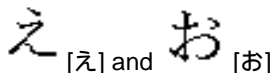
Irregular:

**iku -> itta -> itte(to go) kuru -> kita -> kite**

Notice that these irregular verbs are irregular with respect to the dictionary form, but changing them from the past to the -te form is completely regular.

## Kana

Today, we'll finish up with the lone vowels and learn the last two, **e** and **o**. Remember, this is the last time that I will be providing .gif images of the kana, so get the Japanese viewing on your browsers straightened out. Here's e and o:

 [え] and [お]

For e, first draw the stroke at the top, going from left to right, then draw the next stroke, which looks almost like a seven. Finally, the curved third stroke goes from the right of the second stroke to the bottom right.

For o, start with the short horizontal stroke from left to right. Follow with the long vertical stroke that crosses through the first. Next draw the long curved stroke starting at the left, curving around and finishing at the bottom. In the diagram you can see a small diagonal line connecting the second and third strokes. You can write this and use it to combine the second and third strokes or leave it out and draw them separately, depending on your preference. Finish with the short curved stroke from left to right.

**That's all folks. Be here next time for:**

Particles  
Commonly Heard Phrases  
More Useful Words

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