

Breeze into Japanese

Practical Language for Beginners

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This sample includes:
Lesson 9

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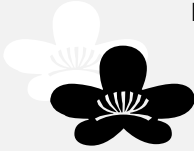
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9

Numbers, Dates and Times



In this lesson you will learn:

Speaking

- To tell someone your telephone number
- To ask how much something is
- To tell and ask the date
- To tell and ask the time

Grammar

- To understand the suffixes associated with numbers

By now, you are able to communicate fairly well with Japanese people, and you have developed friendships with some of them. You may even have met somebody you are fairly eager to spend time with, or, if not, there may be someone who is eager to ask you out to do something together. To make any kind of arrangement with anybody, you need to learn to express dates and times.

In this lesson, you will learn the Japanese number system, how to count money and how to express dates and times to get you ready for that big day. You will also learn some suffixes which go with the numbers.

NUMBERS

I am very pleased to tell you that Japanese uses the same numerical characters as those of the West. So if you could not understand the price a shop clerk tells you, you could always hand him a piece of paper to write it down. Similarly, if you could not tell the time and date you want your friend to meet you, you could always write it on a piece of paper. It is better to be sure of the time and date for an important event, such as inviting out the friend on whom you have a secret crush. After all, there is not much point in going to a restaurant at the wrong time or on the wrong day. The date is written in year/month/day format, and the time is written as hour:minute. That is, 23 April 2004 is written as 2004/04/23 and 25 minutes after 11 o'clock is written as 11:25. Japanese uses the 24-hour system for timetables, for example for trains and buses.

How to Express a Number

Let us look at the basic numbers listed below.



Numbers

zero	0	roku	6	hyaku	100
ichi	1	nana / shichi*	7	sen	1,000
ni	2	hachi	8	man	10,000
san	3	kyū/ ku*	9	jū-man	100,000
yon / shi*	4	jū	10	hyaku-man	1,000,000
go	5				

The Japanese number system is similar to the English number system. For instance, 2,457 is expressed as **2 sen** (*thousand*) + **4 hyaku** (*hundred*) + **5 jū** (*ten*) + 7. The 2, 4 and 5 are called multipliers and the 7 is called the last digit.



A number is expressed as:**

multiplier -man + **multiplier -sen**
 + **multiplier -hyaku** + **multiplier -jū** + the last digit

Some numbers go through phonetic changes when **hyaku** and **sen** are combined with multipliers: they are **sanbyaku**, 300, **roppyaku**, 600, **happyaku**, 800, **sanzen**, 3000 and **hassen**, 8000. The multiplier **ichi**, 1, is used only for **ichi-man**, 10,000, and not used for **sen**, 1,000, **hyaku**, 100, and **jū**, 10. Hence 11,111 is **ichi-man sen hyaku jū ichi**. You are now able to produce any number from 1 to 1,000,000 in Japanese.

Examples

5,263 go-sen ni-hyaku roku-jū san

7,928 nana-sen kyū-hyaku ni-jū hachi

EXERCISES

9.1. Say the numbers from 1 to 10, and then 100, 1,000, and 10,000 aloud. The correct answers are recorded on the track for Exercise 9.1.

9.2. I shall tell you some Japanese telephone numbers. Write them down. Japanese telephone numbers are expressed as “number for the area code – number for the exchange – number.” The numbers are said individually; **no** is used for hyphens and **ban**, number, is put at the end; 2 and 5 are pronounced as **nī** and **gō** when describing telephone numbers.

1. 072-856-7211

2. _____

3. _____

*Note that 4, 7 and 9 have two forms in Japanese.

Note that **shi, 4, **shichi**, 7, and **ku**, 9, are not used as multipliers (they are used only for the last digit).

9.3. Translate into English:

1. *ni-sen nana-hyaku san-jū ni* _____

2. *san-man yon-sen go-hyaku roku-jū hachi* _____

3. *yon-sen kyū-hyaku hachi-jū ichi* _____

Translate into rōmaji:

4. 735 _____

5. 5,241 _____

6. 9,726 _____

MONEY



The most important suffix that is put after a number is the suffix **-en**, which tells an amount of money. **_-en**, written also as ¥_, is translated as **_ yen**. For example, **ni-hyaku-en**, ¥200, means **200 yen**.

Let us try to make the sentence *How much is this?* Consider **kore wa ni-hyaku-en desu**, *this is 200 yen*. By replacing **ni-hyaku-en** with **ikura**, *how much*, and putting **ka** at the end, we get **kore wa ikura desu ka**, *how much is this?*



The pronoun **ikura*** is used to indicate *how much*.

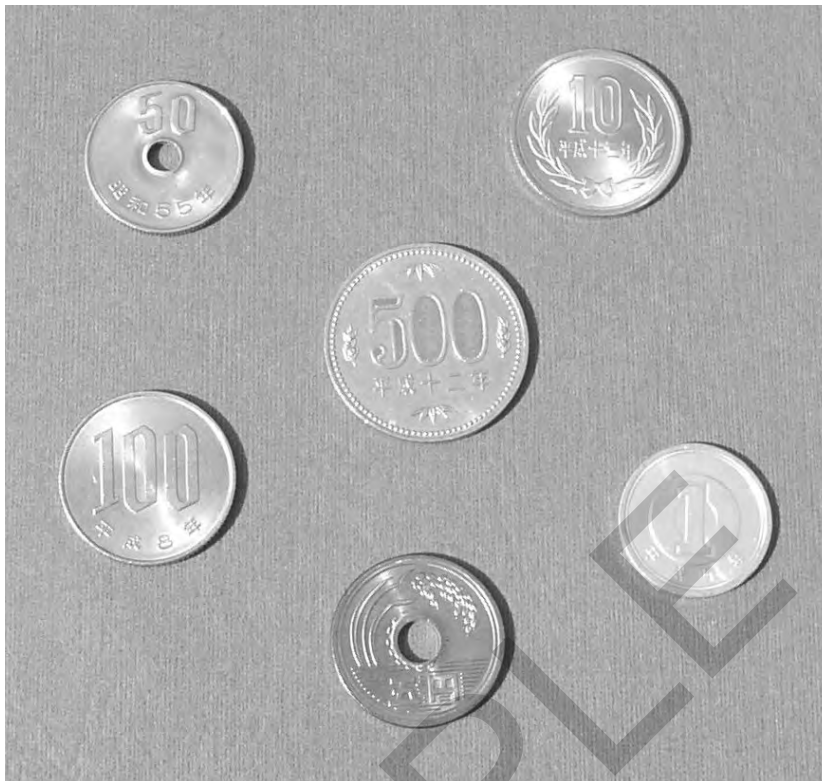


Japanese paper money.



Area where you pay for your shopping purchases.

***Ikura** is defined as a number (noun) in Japanese grammar. I have defined it as a pronoun in accordance with English grammar.



Japanese coins.



Conversation 1: How Much Is This?

Tom goes shopping.

Tom:	<i>Kore wa ikura desu ka.</i>	<i>How much is this?</i>
Clerk:	<i>(Kore wa) go-hyaku kyū-jū-en desu.</i>	<i>It's 590 yen.</i>
Tom:	<i>Kore wa (ikura desu ka).</i>	<i>How about this?</i>
Clerk:	<i>(Kore wa) roppyaku san-jū-en desu.</i>	<i>It's 630 yen.</i>
Tom:	<i>Kore o kudasai.</i>	<i>May I have this please?</i>

DATES

Months

It is very easy to express months in Japanese. You just put the suffix **-gatsu** after a number to indicate the month, as you can see from the table below. **Yon**, 4, **nana**, 7, and **kyū**, 9, are not used to indicate the months; instead, the alternate forms of 4, 7, and 9 (**shi**, **shichi** and **ku**, respectively) are used. We shall write numbers associated with the month, day, hour and minutes without hyphens. That is, instead of **jū-ni**, 12, **jūni** is used to write the numerical part of **jūni-gatsu**, *December*; instead of **san-jū-ichi**, 31, **sanjūichi** is used to write the numerical part of **sanjūichinichi**, *31st*; etc.

Months

<i>ichi-gatsu</i> January	<i>go-gatsu</i> May	<i>ku-gatsu</i> September
<i>ni-gatsu</i> February	<i>roku-gatsu</i> June	<i>jū-gatsu</i> October
<i>san-gatsu</i> March	<i>shichi-gatsu</i> July	<i>jūichi-gatsu</i> November
<i>shi-gatsu</i> April	<i>hachi-gatsu</i> August	<i>jūni-gatsu</i> December

Days of the Month

Days of the month are slightly more complicated, and you must memorize the 1st to the 10th of the month. The suffix **-nichi** is put after the numbers to obtain the rest of the days of the month except those of the 14th, 20th and 24th.

Days of the Month

<i>tsuitachi</i> 1st	<i>jūichi-nichi</i> 11th	<i>nijūichi-nichi</i> 21st
<i>futsuka</i> 2nd	<i>jūni-nichi</i> 12th	<i>nijūni-nichi</i> 22nd
<i>mikka</i> 3rd	<i>jūsan-nichi</i> 13th	<i>nijūsan-nichi</i> 23rd
<i>yokka</i> 4th	<i>jūyokka*</i> 14th	<i>nijūyokka*</i> 24th
<i>itsuka</i> 5th	<i>jūgo-nichi</i> 15th	<i>nijūgo-nichi</i> 25th
<i>muika</i> 6th	<i>jūroku-nichi</i> 16th	<i>nijūroku-nichi</i> 26th
<i>nanoka</i> 7th	<i>jūshichi-nichi*</i> 17th	<i>nijūshichi-nichi*</i> 27th
<i>yōka</i> 8th	<i>jūhachi-nichi</i> 18th	<i>nijūhachi-nichi</i> 28th
<i>kokonoka</i> 9th	<i>jūku-nichi*</i> 19th	<i>nijūku-nichi*</i> 29th
<i>tōka</i> 10th	<i>hatsuka</i> 20th	<i>sanjū-nichi</i> 30th
		<i>sanjūichi-nichi</i> 31st

Days of the Week

You must memorize the days of the week since they don't follow any rules except that they all carry the suffix **-yōbi**.

Days of the Week

<i>nichi-yōbi</i> Sunday	<i>sui-yōbi</i> Wednesday	<i>do-yōbi</i> Saturday
<i>getsu-yōbi</i> Monday	<i>moku-yōbi</i> Thursday	
<i>ka-yōbi</i> Tuesday	<i>kin-yōbi</i> Friday	

How to Tell a Date

Japanese expresses a date in the order of the year, followed by the month, followed by the day of the month, followed by the day of the week, and it is written as year/month/day of the month/day of the week. The suffix **-nen**, *year*, is put after a number for the year.

Examples

<i>Sen kyū-hyaku kyū-jū kyū-nen go-gatsu nanoka getsu-yōbi</i>	<i>Monday 7 May 1999</i>
<i>Ni-sen ichi-nen san-gatsu itsuka sui-yōbi</i>	<i>Wednesday 5 March 2001</i>


*Note that **shi**, 4, **nana**, 7, and **kyū**, 9, are not used to indicate the days of the month.

The suffixes associated with dates are summarized below.

Suffixes

- gatsu* is put after a number to tell the month.
- nen* is put after a number to tell the year.
- nichi* is put after some numbers to tell the day of the month.
- yōbi* denotes the day of the week.

EXERCISES

9.4.  You have asked a shop clerk *kore wa ikura desu ka*, how much is it? Listen for the replies. Write down the amount you hear in English.

1. _____ yen

4. _____ yen

2. _____ yen

5. _____ yen

3. _____ yen

9.5.  I shall tell you the birthday for each of Hanako's family members. Write down the date for each of her family members in English. The Japanese word for birthday is (o)*tanjōbi*/bāsudē.

1. Father's birthday is _____.

2. Mother's birthday is _____.



A pair of Hina dolls to celebrate the festival for girls.



A warrior helmet decoration. On Children's Day, parents put it out on display, hoping their sons grow to be strong.



Tanabata Festival: decorations on a street.

3. The elder sister's birthday is _____.

4. Hanako's birthday is _____.

5. The younger sister's birthday is _____.

9.6.  Say the following special dates in Japanese. The correct answers are recorded on the track for Exercise 9.6.

1. 1 January ((O)**shōgatsu**, *New Year's Day*)

2. 3 March (**Hinamatsuri**, *The Festival of Dolls*, regarded as festival for girls)

3. 5 May (**Kodomo no hi**, *Children's Day*, regarded as festival for boys)

4. 7 July (**Tanabata**, *The Festival of Stars*, celebration of the annual tryst of stars Altair and Vega, separated by the Milky Way)

5. 25 December (**Kurisumasu**, *Christmas*)

6. 31 December (**Ōmisoka**, *New Year's Eve*)

Now, write and then say complete sentences to state the date with its special festivity. The correct answers are recorded on the track for Exercise 9.6.

7. *Ichigatsu tsuitachi wa (o)shōgatsu desu. January 1 is New Year's Day.*

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

9.7. Translate into English:

1. *Ni-sen ni-nen san-gatsu itsuka sui-yōbi* _____

2. *Ni-sen-nen roku-gatsu nijūgo-nichi getsu-yōbi*

3. *Sen kyū-hyaku hachi-jū ichi-nen san-gatsu futsuka do-yōbi*

4. *Sen nana-hyaku ni-jū roku-nen hachi-gatsu jūku-nichi nichiyōbi*

Translate into rōmaji:

5. Saturday 14 February 2004 _____

6. Wednesday 28 October 1579 _____

7. Sunday 5 July 1400 _____

8. Monday 1 January 2001 _____

TIME OF DAY

By now, you are able to make arrangements for a particular day and week. You now have to learn to express the time of day so that you don't mess up that big day of yours by arriving too late.

Hours

Hours are obtained by just putting the suffix **-ji** after the numbers, except for **yo-ji**, *four o'clock*, which has gone through a phonetic change (from **yon-ji**).

<i>ichi-ji</i>	1 o'clock	<i>go-ji</i>	5 o'clock	<i>ku-ji*</i>	9 o'clock
<i>ni-ji</i>	2 o'clock	<i>roku-ji</i>	6 o'clock	<i>jū-ji</i>	10 o'clock
<i>san-ji</i>	3 o'clock	<i>shichi-ji*</i>	7 o'clock	<i>jūichi-ji</i>	11 o'clock
<i>yo-ji*</i>	4 o'clock	<i>hachi-ji</i>	8 o'clock	<i>jūni-ji</i>	12 o'clock

*Note that **shi**, 4, **nana**, 7, and **kyū**, 9, are not used to indicate hours.

Minutes

The minutes table is shown below. To obtain 2 to 9 minutes, add **-pun** or **-fun** after the numbers. **Ip-pun**, 1 minute, and **jup-pun**, 10 minutes, have gone through phonetic changes. Notice that there are two forms each for 6 minutes, and 8 minutes, and they are both used interchangeably.

<i>ip-pun</i>	1 minute	<i>go-fun</i>	5 minutes	<i>hachi-fun</i>	8 minutes
<i>ni-fun</i>	2 minutes	<i>roku-fun</i>	6 minutes	<i>hap-pun</i>	8 minutes
<i>san-pun</i>	3 minutes	<i>rop-pun</i>	6 minutes	<i>kyū-fun*</i>	9 minutes
<i>yon-fun*</i>	4 minutes	<i>nana-fun*</i>	7 minutes	<i>jup-pun</i>	10 minutes

When you put **jū**, 10, **nijū**, 20, **sanjū**, 30, **yonjū**, 40, and **gojū**, 50 before 1 to 9 minutes of the above table, you can obtain 11 minutes, 12 minutes, 59 minutes, and so on. You obtain 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60 minutes by putting **ni**, 2, **san**, 3, **yon**, 4, **go**, 5, and **roku**, 6, in front of **jup-pun**, 10 minutes; they are **nijup-pun**, **sanjup-pun**, **yonjup-pun**, **gojup-pun** and **rokujup-pun** respectively.

Putting 10 in front of 1, 2, 3 and 4 minutes, you get:

<i>jū-ip-pun</i>	11 minutes
<i>jū-ni-fun</i>	12 minutes
<i>jū-san-pun</i>	13 minutes
<i>jū-yon-fun</i>	14 minutes

Putting 20 in front of 1, 2, 3 and 4 minutes, you get:

<i>nijū-ip-pun</i>	21 minutes
<i>nijū-ni-fun</i>	22 minutes
<i>nijū-san-fun</i>	23 minutes
<i>nijū-yon-fun</i>	24 minutes

Putting 30, 40 and 50 in front of 1 minute, you get:

<i>sanjū-ip-pun</i>	31 minutes
<i>yonjū-ip-fun</i>	41 minutes
<i>gojū-ip-pun</i>	51 minutes

Putting 50 in front of 5 and 6 minutes, you get:

<i>gojū-go-pun</i>	55 minutes
<i>gojū-roku-fun</i>	56 minutes
<i>gojū-rop-pun</i>	56 minutes

How to Tell the Time

In Japanese you tell the time by telling the hour followed by the minute, and it is written as hour:minute.

Examples

<i>ni-ji jūgo-fun</i>	2:15
<i>ku-ji sanjūgo-fun</i>	9:35

Japanese has expressions such as *before/after* the hour (e.g., *before/after* 3 o'clock) just as in English. In these cases, **mae/sugi**, *before/after*, is put after the hour to indicate *before* or *after* as follows.

Examples

<i>san-ji mae</i>	<i>before</i> 3 o'clock
<i>san-ji sugi</i>	<i>after</i> 3 o'clock

*Note that **shi**, 4, **shichi**, 7, and **ku**, 9, are not used to indicate minutes.

Japanese has expressions such as *to/past* the hour (e.g., 5 minutes *to/past* 3 o'clock) just as in English. In these cases, **mae/sugi** is put after the minutes to indicate *to* or *past*.

Examples

san-ji go-fun mae 5 minutes to 3 o'clock
san-ji go-fun sugi 5 minutes past 3 o'clock

Although there is no special word for a *quarter* of an hour, Japanese has **han** for *half past* and it is put after the hour. So 9:30 may be expressed in the following ways.

ku-ji sanjūp-pun 9:30
ku-ji sanjūp-pun sugi 30 minutes past 9 o'clock
ku-ji han half past 9

Gozen and **gogo** are used for *A.M.* and *P.M.*, and they come before the hour.

Examples

gogo ni-ji jūgo-fun 2:15 P.M.
gozen ku-ji sanjūgo-fun 9:35 A.M.

The suffixes and nouns which are associated with time are collected below.

Suffixes

han half past hour
mae before/to hour/minutes
sugi after/past hour/minutes

Nouns

gogo P.M.
gozen A.M.

-fun/pun is put after a number to tell minutes, and it is translated as minutes.

-ji is put after a number to tell the hour, and it is translated as o'clock.

HOW TO ASK THE DATE AND TIME

The prefix **nan-**, *what*, is put before **nen**, **gatsu**, **nichi**, **yōbi**, **ji** and **fun** to obtain the following expressions.

nan-nen what year? *nan-ji* what time?, what hour?
nan-gatsu what month? *nan-fun* how many minutes?
nan-nichi what day of the month?
nan-yōbi what day of the week?

The date and time may be asked using the following vocabulary.

Nouns and Adverbs*

ima at this moment *kyō* today

***Ima** and **kyō** are defined as nouns in Japanese. I have defined them as nouns and adverbs in accordance with English grammar.

Examples

<i>Kyō wa nan-gatsu nan-nichi desu ka.</i>	<i>What day (month and day) is it today?</i>
<i>(kyō wa) san-gatsu hatsuka desu.</i>	<i>It's the 20th of March.</i>
<i>San-gatsu mikka wa nan-yōbi desu ka.</i>	<i>What day of the week is the 3rd of March?</i>
<i>Ima (wa) nan-ji desu ka.</i>	<i>What time is it now?</i>
<i>(Ima wa) san-ji desu.</i>	<i>It is 3 o'clock.</i>



Conversation 2: What Day Is It Today?

Tom asks the date and time.

Tom:	<i>Kyō wa nan-gatsu nan-nichi desu ka.</i>	<i>What day is it today?</i>
Hanako:	<i>(Kyō wa) go-gatsu mikka desu.</i>	<i>It is the 3rd of May.</i>
Tom:	<i>(Kyō wa) nan-yōbi desu ka.</i>	<i>What day of the week is it?</i>
Hanako:	<i>(Kyō wa) sui-yōbi desu.</i>	<i>It's a Wednesday.</i>
Tom:	<i>Ima (wa) nan-ji desu ka.</i>	<i>What time is it now?</i>
Hanako:	<i>(Ima wa) jūni-ji yonjūgo-fun sugi desu.</i>	<i>It's 45 minutes past 12.</i>

OTHER SUFFIXES ASSOCIATED WITH NUMBERS

One of the more difficult features of the Japanese number system is the concept of classifiers, namely special words which are attached after numbers to show to which categories of objects they belong. For instance, in the English language, you talk of “two *sheets* of paper” (rather than “two papers”), “three *cups* of water” (rather than “three waters”) or “two *pieces* of cake.” The words *sheet*, *cup* and *piece* are called classifiers because they classify the category of things, namely papers, liquid and “sliced objects” respectively. In the Japanese number system, most articles must be described in terms of classifiers. The following vocabulary lists the classifiers associated with counting animals, just to illustrate a few of the many classifiers that exist in Japanese.

Suffixes

- hiki* is put after a number to count animals such as dogs, tigers, rabbits*, fish and insects.
- tō* is put after a number to count animals such as whales, cows and horses.
- nin* is put after a number to count people.
- wa* is put after a number to count animals such as rabbits*, and birds such as ducks and chickens.

It should be also pointed out that classifiers go through some phonetic changes when they are combined with some numbers (e.g., **ichi-hiki** becomes **ippiki**). You will see the following suffixes, **-ban** and **-mai**, as we continue.

Suffixes

- ban* is put after a number to tell the order. For example, *ichi-ban* means number one; *ni-ban* means number two; etc.
- mai* is put after a number to count thin flat objects such as stamps, papers, tickets, plates, blankets, etc.

*Note that rabbits are counted with both **-hiki** and **-wa**.



Kippu-uriba sign.



Train tickets.

Numbers are not followed by any particle.

Examples

Kippu o san-mai kudasai.

May I have three tickets please?

Okāsan wa sakana o ni-hiki kaimasu.

Mother buys two fish.

Conversation 3: What Time Is It Now?

Tom buys a train ticket at a station using the following vocabulary.

Nouns		Particle	Suffix
<i>densha</i> electric train	<i>sen</i> (train) line	<i>made</i> until, till	<i>-sen</i> line _
<i>purattohōmu</i> platform	<i>tsuri</i> change		

Tom: *Sumimasen. Ima (wa) nan-ji desu ka.*

Excuse me. What time is it now?

Clerk: *(Ima wa) hachi-ji nijūgo-fun sugi desu.*

It is 25 past 8.

Tom: *(Kippu o) Seto made ichi-mai kudasai.*

May I have 1 ticket to Seto please?

(Kippu wa) ikura desu ka.

How much is it?

Clerk: *(Kippu wa) yon-hyaku hachi-jū-en desu.*

It is ¥480.

Tom puts money on the money-receiving tray.

Tom: *(Kore wa) sen-en desu.*

This is ¥1,000.

Clerk: *(O)tsuri * wa go-hyaku ni-jū-en desu.*

The change is ¥520.

Tom: *Densha wa nan-ji desu ka.*

What time is the (electric) train?

Clerk: *(Densha wa) ku-ji go-fun desu.*

It's at 9:05.

Tom: *Purattohōmu wa doko desu ka.*


Where is the platform?

Clerk: *(Purattohōmu wa) ni-ban sen desu.*

It's the (train) line number 2.

*See honorific speech in "Japanese Customs and Culture" on page 96.

EXERCISES

9.8.  Write down in English the times I shall tell you.

1. _____


2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

9.9.  Say the following times aloud in Japanese. The correct answers are recorded on the track for Exercise 9.9.

1. 2:15

2. 4:30

3. 6:00

4. 8:40

5. 10:20

6. 12:00

9.10. Translate the times into English:

1. *jūichi-ji nijūgo-fun sugi* _____

2. *ku-ji jūnana-fun mae* _____

3. *gogo roku-ji sanjūp-pun* _____

4. *go-ji han* _____


Tell the times in *rōmaji*:

5. 1:15 P.M.

6. 12:30 P.M.

7. 6:45 A.M.

8. 7:23 P.M.

9.11.  I shall ask some questions about Conversation 3. Reply to each question aloud in Japanese. The correct answers are recorded at the end of this exercise.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

JAPANESE CUSTOMS AND CULTURE

Choice of Japanese Speech Style

There are four levels of speech style in Japanese: polite, plain, honorific and rude. Their differences are listed below.

Polite Speech

Polite speech is used in formal situations, such as when you speak in public, in business, while shopping, and to strangers or superiors. It is characterized by the use of the polite verbal forms **desu** and **V•masu**.

When you talk to another person, the speech style is determined by the status of the person to whom you are talking, and by the degree of familiarity between you. When he is of equal or higher status than you are, or when he and you are not very familiar with each other, you use the polite speech style. The speakers' relative status is determined by a combination of factors, such as age (an older person is regarded as being superior to you), gender (a male is regarded as being superior to a female), rank, social status and favors done or owed. Observance of status hierarchy is particularly strict within an in-group situation.

In the reverse case, where you are of a higher status, you have a choice of using plain speech or polite speech. The choice depends partly on how great the status difference is, and partly on your personal preference.

When you talk to a stranger, you use the polite speech style unless there is an obvious difference in age or social status, as reflected in dress, manner, occupation, or gender, for example.

Women are usually expected to use the polite speech style more often than men. Women are not as likely as men to speak in the plain speech style to people of lower status; they restrict the use of plain speech to immediate family members, close friends and children.

In this book, you will learn polite speech since that is the speech style you should use: it is safer to be polite than plain, and honorific speech is not called for on the part of a foreign speaker.

Plain Speech

The plain speech style is used in informal, everyday situations among family, friends, equals, or when addressing children. For example, if you replace **desu** with **da** in a polite-style sentence, it will become a plain-style sentence: **kore wa inu da** is a plain form of **kore wa inu desu**, *this is a dog*. Similarly, by changing the endings of **V•masu**-verbs, you may convert polite-style **V•masu**-verb sentences into plain-style sentences. For example, **mizu o nomu** is a plain form of (**watashi wa**) **mizu o nomimasu**.

Honorific Speech

You use honorific speech when you want to express your respect for the person to whom you are speaking, or about whom you are speaking. For instance, if you were a clerk in a shop, you would use honorific speech to a customer so that you may make a sale; also, if you were talking to your teacher or supervisor, you would use honorific speech. There are two ways (Methods 1 and 2 below) to show your respect for others.

METHOD 1: Besides using polite speech, you may show your respect for the person to whom you are speaking, or about whom you are speaking, by exalting him by using honorific nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions when referring to him and anything directly associated with him, such as his family, house and possessions.



The most common form of expressing your respect for the person to whom, or about whom, you are speaking is by prefixing **o** or **go** to nouns and adjectives, referring to the person or a thing belonging to him.

Example

Kore wa boku no tegami desu.

This is my letter.

Kore wa sensei no (o)tegami desu.

This is the teacher's letter.

In some words those honorific prefixes have become so common that they have lost their honorific meaning and are thought of as a part of words. For instance, (**o**)**cha** is almost always used to mean *tea* and its plain form **cha** is rarely used. Not every noun or adjective takes an honorific prefix and there is no specific rule as to whether a word is prefixed by **o** or **go**. For example, you may prefix **o** on **ringo**, *apple*, but **banana**, *banana*, does not take any honorific prefix. It is only through hearing and reading that you can learn which particular word may take an honorific prefix **o** or **go**; hence, you should not try to make honorific words up by yourself until you have reached a more advanced level of proficiency in the language.

Another common way of expressing your respect for the person to whom you are speaking, or about whom you are speaking, is to add **-san** to his family, as shown below.

Example

Kore wa anata no imōto-san desu ka.

Is this your younger sister?

Hai kore wa watashi no imōto desu.

Yes, this is (my) younger sister.

METHOD 2: You may show your respect by using humble terms for yourself by depreciating yourself and your belongings.

Expressing deeper respect for the other person creates a greater distance between you both, and, unless you are advanced in Japanese, you should not try to use honorific speech.

Rude Speech

Rude speech may be used toward inferiors, or as insults, and you should obviously avoid it.

WRITING EXERCISE: HIRAGANA FOR HA, HI, FU, HE AND HO

Practice the five hiragana characters は, ひ, ふ, へ and ほ.

は	は	は
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へ

ひ

ほ	ほ	ほ	ほ
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ふ	ふ	ふ	ふ
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What you must remember from this lesson to proceed to the next lesson:

A number is expressed as: multiplier-**man** + multiplier-**sen** + multiplier-**hyaku** + multiplier-**jū** + the last digit.

A date is expressed in the order of the year, followed by the month, followed by the day of the month, followed by the day of the week: number-**nen** + number-**gatsu** + the day of the month + the day of the week (-**yōbi**).

Time is expressed by telling the hour followed by the minute: number-**ji** + number-**pun/fun**.

O/go is put in front of some nouns, adjectives and verbs to show respect for the person to whom, or about whom, you are speaking.

