



By Craig Desorcy

<http://www.teaching-in-japan.com>

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About Craig



That's Aki and me, in Kyoto. Aki is my wife and her name in Japanese means fall - the season.

13 years now in Japan and its helped me become a dad, school owner, a man and a friend to many wanting to do well teaching in Japan.

Japan has been my **real life** self improvement seminar. Everything I am and have I owe to the lessons Japan has taught me about life.

Today, I specialize in teaching small children super easy English. Live in a great place with Aki and Celina (Celina is my 11 year old daughter)... Thanks to Japan.

I also help other teachers or teachers to be do well in Japan. You can read the whole story here <http://www.teaching-in-japan.com/ebook/> which goes into detail on how all this teaching in Japan stuff came about. It was not pretty!

Easy Guide to Speaking Japanese Today

This short report is for the person with absolutely no Japanese speaking ability.

When putting this report together I asked what someone would need to know first about speaking Japanese. The following is what came to mind.

1. Japanese Vowels
2. Romaji
3. Useful Japanese phrases
4. Some useful travel Japanese phrases
5. Dealing with money
6. Counting basics
7. Japanese numbers

Go way beyond the basics I've laid out here and have a look at <http://www.japanteach.com>

That's Takanori Tomita's website. He works as a Japanese translator and also teaches Japanese online, with other licensed and certified Japanese teachers.

Let's Start With Japanese Vowels

The foundation of speaking Japanese

Here is some good news about learning Japanese - there are just 5 vowel sounds. If you learn these five sounds and make sure you pronounce them right each time, you'll have no trouble being understood in Japanese.

You know that English has 5 vowels, but did you know that it has 13 or so vowel sounds? (This depends a little on the accent) For example, "o as in orange," "o as in octopus" and so on? English is tricky for people to learn, but in Japanese, you just have five sounds, and they never change...

A as in "father" (sounds like "ah")

I as in "liter" (sounds like "ee")

U as in "rule" (sounds like "oo")

E as in "red" (sounds like "eh")

O as in "orangutan" (sounds like "o")

That's it, and every time you see a vowel in Japanese, that's exactly how you pronounce it. If you've ever studied Italian or Spanish, these are the exact same sounds.

Let's take some expressions most everybody knows and look at how they are pronounced...

Konnichiwa - "Hello" - Sounds like "ko-nee-chee-wah."

Arigato - "Thank you" - Sounds like "Ah-ree-gah-to."

Ohayo gozaimasu - "Good morning" - Sounds like "oh-hah-yo go-za-ee-mah-su."

And how about some place names...

Chiba (my hometown!) - Sounds like "Chee-bah."

Osaka - Sounds like "O-sah-kah."

Japanese vowels are really simple but there are a few things that are tricky, and you have to be a little careful. One of these is the "y" that sometimes come before "o" as in "Tokyo." This is especially tricky after the "R" as in "Ryokan."

Basically, pronounce the "yo" as one sound. So, in the case of "Tokyo," don't pronounce them separately like "To-kee-o." It should be just two syllables, like "To-kyo."

It takes a little practice to pronounce them fast, but you'll get it after a while. There is a Japanese name "Tokio" which is pronounced like "To-kee-o," so if you say it wrong you could say the wrong word.

Let's practice...

Tokyo - "to-kyo"

Kyoto - "kyo-to"

Ryoko (means "travel") - "ryo-ko"

Another tricky part of Japanese vowels, which is really important to master, is that there are long and short vowel sounds. We don't have this in English. Basically, it's like you hold the sound for one or two beats. Here's an example to show you the difference:

Ookii (pronounced "oh-kee" with the long "o") - "big"

Oki (pronounced "o-kee" with both short sounds) - "out at sea"

When you say "ookii" (big), draw out the vowel sounds a little. Practice both words so that you make them differently.

Actually, Japanese vowels are shorter than English vowels. The Japanese long vowels are more like English vowels. For an example, take a look at the Japanese word for "Christmas":

Kurisumasu

Looks like it has too many vowels, right? Well, if you pronounce this quickly, it sounds almost exactly like the English "Christmas." At first, practice saying the words distinctly, then pick up the pace once you get it down.

The long-short vowel thing trips up almost everybody I know. I've been speaking Japanese for years, and I still goof up quite a bit. I should practice my own advice and practice! This point is really important. Take a look at these two words...

Komon - means "advisor, consultant."

Koomon (with the first o long) - means the place where you poop from!

Now, you don't want to introduce anybody as your "Koomon." See? It's important.

One more bit of advice. Some Japanese words end with "e" and it's important to always pronounce it as "eh" and not "ee" or "ay." For example, the word "sake," which means that delicious stuff we drink hot in the winter time, should be pronounced "sah-keh." Be careful not to slip and say "sah-kee" or "sah-kay." If you do this, you'll be saying totally different words. Nothing as bad as "koomon," but still...

Lastly, be careful and get in the habit of pronouncing these five basic sounds correctly each time. Don't slip into English pronunciation. I do that sometimes when I get tired or something, and if you pronounce those Japanese words with English vowels, nobody will understand you. Trust me!

Keep it to those basic five and you'll have no trouble...

A as in "father" (sounds like "ah")

I as in "liter" (sounds like "ee")

U as in "rule" (sounds like "oo")

E as in "red" (sounds like "eh")

O as in "orangutan" (sounds like "o")



The above photo was taken in Kyoto. A must see place while you're in Japan. Say the word Kyoto again ;-)

Romaji - The One Japanese Writing System You Already Know

The Japanese language uses four different writing systems: Chinese characters (kanji), the two Japanese alphabets (katakana and hiragana), and the English alphabet. The English alphabet is called "romaji."

Japanese pronunciation is not too hard, and most of the sounds in Romaji are the same as English. Here's a list of what you'll find: B, D, F, G, H, J, K, M, N, P, R, S, T, Y, sometimes W, and the vowels, A, E, I, O, U. There is no C, L, Q, V, or X.

A few sounds are the same as English, but are written differently:

"tu" is pronounced "tsu."

"ti" is pronounced "chi."

"si" is pronounced "shi."

The reason for this is that romaji matches each Japanese syllable with an English consonant-vowel combination. For example, in Japanese "ku" is not considered two separate sounds. It is one letter. This is how the language works. So, the choice of English letters in romaji reflects that. Instead of using three letters "tsu," they use two "tu."

You'll sometimes see it written either way, which is a little confusing, but just keep in mind when you see "tu," "ti" and "si" that they aren't pronounced exactly how they look.

There are a few sounds that are a little different:

First off, the "tu" we mentioned above. Of course, English sometimes has "tsu" in the middle of a word or at the end, but in Japanese this is a sound by itself. Some words start with it, like the word "tsunami." It takes a little practice at first, but you get the hang of pronouncing words this way. Here are some words for you to practice with:

tunami - pronounced "tsunami"

Tudanuma - pronounced "Tsudanuma" - (place name in Chiba)

tuna - pronounced "tsuna" - "tuna"

tuka - pronounced "tsuka" - "add"

tuti - pronounced "tsuchi" - "earth"

Also, Japanese "wa" is sometimes spelled "ha." I don't know why this is, but in sentences where the particle "wa" is used, it is always written as "ha." This may not make sense if you haven't learned a little Japanese already, but once you learn a few basic phrases, you'll know which "wa" I'm talking about!

Another tricky one is the "f." In Japanese, it's a much lighter sound. It's kind of halfway between the "f" and "h". Make an "f" in English and notice how your top teeth press against your bottom lip. In Japanese, keep your mouth open. Then, simply blow the air through. If you listen to a Japanese speaker, you'll understand how it's supposed to sound. You can practice with a few common words...

Fuji

futon

tofu

The "f" is only used when there is a "u" following it.

The Japanese "r" is a little tricky, too. It is not the hard "r" of North American English, but more like the way Brits and Ozzies pronounce it. The tongue just taps the roof of the mouth. When pronounced quickly, it almost sounds like a "d." It's a little like the "dd" in "ladder."

There are some three letter combos in romaji. These are used when there is a "y." For example, "Tokyo." In "Tokyo," there are two sounds: "to" and "kyo." Get in the habit of pronouncing the "kyo" as one sound, and not as "kee-o."

The trickiest of these are the ones that follow "r" like "ryo" and "ryu." It takes a little practice, and to be honest, I still have to work at it!

You'll also see "jya", "jyu," and "jyo" written as three sounds. But, with a "j", they basically sound the same as "ja", "ju" and "jo."

One last important point about romaji is its double consonants. Some words, like the place name "Hokkaido" have double consonants. In "Hokkaido," you have to pronounce the "kk" very hard. Most Japanese consonants are pronounced lightly, but in this case, hit them hard. Let the "kk" sort of stop the word halfway, then finish. Here are some examples to practice with:

Hokkaido - place name | happa – leaf | shussan - give birth
mattaku - completely

That's about all there is to romaji. It's the easiest of Japan's four writing systems to learn! The others would take a book - no, books! - to explain. Romaji will at least get you speaking and pronouncing Japanese... you can take a course on writing kanji later!

Useful Phrases Japanese Everybody Should Know

The best way to learn Japanese, or any language, is to learn the natural way. Do it the same way you learned your first language as a kid. Don't remember? No worries, I'll explain...

When you are learning Japanese, don't work too hard on the grammar (that's a relief, huh?). Japanese is not so grammatical as European languages are. The tricky part of learning Japanese is figuring out how to say things the Japanese way.

For this, I recommend studying grammar patterns rather than grammar. Take any speech pattern, and replace words with other words. For example, the simple sentence pattern "I like ..." is "... ga suki desu."

"I like apples" - "Ringo(apples) ga suki desu"

Now, replace "apples" with whatever you want. This is how kids learn, and this is the most effective way of studying Japanese!

Japanese has no cases, no genders, usually no number, just two verb tenses, no "the" or "a", and only a few different word endings. Like other Asian languages, the grammar is fairly simple for those of us who have wrestled with any of those tricky European languages where everything changes and has to be perfectly grammatical.

Before you start on your grammar patterns, here are some simple Japanese phrases that are essential:

Greetings

"Konnichi wa" - "Hello"... This can be used pretty much any time of day, although there is a different greeting for morning and night.

"Ohayo gozaimasu" - "Good morning"... Pretty much used before noon. With friends and people you have a casual relationship with, you can drop the "gozaimasu" and just say "ohayo."

"Konban wa" - "Good evening"... Basically use it after dark.

"Sayonara" - "Goodbye"... This is a kind of big goodbye. For smaller or more casual ones...

"Ja ne" or "Mata ne" - "See you later"

P's And Q's

"Arigato" - "Thank you"... There are some variations on this according to situation...

"Domo" - Casual. Getting your change at the convenience store. When your friend hands you a cup of coffee.

"Domo arigato gozaimasu" - A big thank you. Somebody does you a big favor. A stranger helps you find your way to the airport. This goes well with a big bow!

"Sumimasen" - "Excuse me"... This is used for various situations. When you approach somebody to ask for something, when you bump into somebody on the train, when you need somebody to move so you can get off the train. This is also used as an apology for making somebody do something for you. You say it afterwards, sort of like a cross between "excuse me for asking" and "thank you."

"Yoroshiku onegaishimasu" - "(no translation!)" - This kind of means "please," but there is no exact matching word or phrase in English. This is like a magic word in Japanese. Use this with a deep bow when you first meet someone. It is basically used whenever you ask someone to do something for you.

Introductions

"(name) desu" - "My name is (name)." - This is the most common way of introducing yourself. Textbooks will tell you that the phrase is "Watashi no namae wa (name) desu," but I've never heard anybody say this in all my years in Japan! Save that for the textbooks.

"(age)-sai desu" - "I am (age) years old." - See how simple Japanese is!?

"(place) kara kimashita" - "I am from (place)." - People will constantly ask you what country you are from, and this is a good way to answer. Or, you can just say "(country)-jin desu." This means "I am (country)'s person," like saying "I am American" or "I am Australian."

And, the most important beginning phrase of all:

"(place or thing) wa doko desu ka?" - "Where is (place or thing)". - Trust me, this phrase comes in handy A LOT.

That's it for now. You're ready to introduce yourself, be polite and figure out where stuff is! Good luck!

Now we're going to cover some useful travel Japanese phrases on the next page.

Useful Japanese Phrases For Traveling

When you come to Japan, it's always good to have some phrases under your belt. You don't have to be fluent, but it's nice to be able to get around. In Japan, it's sometimes tough for travelers to find people who speak English. Here are some important phrases you should take with you!

Basics

Yes - "hai"

No - "iie" - This isn't really the word for "no" exactly... it's a little tough to explain, but anyway, if you use "iie" you'll be understood.

Thank you - "Arigato" - Thank people a lot! That's the Japanese way.

Do you speak English? - "Eigo shaberemasu ka?" or "Eigo hanasemasu ka?" Another way you can say it is "Eigo wa daijoubu desu ka?" This means something like, "Is English okay?"

Excuse me - "sumimasen" - When you want to ask somebody a question, or when you bump into somebody on those crowded trains!

I'm sorry - "Gomen nasai" - Hopefully you don't have to say this too much.

It's okay - "daijoubu desu" - This phrase comes in handy in all kinds of situations!

Getting Around

Where is (place) - "(place) wa doko desu ka?" - This is one of the most important phrases to remember!

Where is the nearest train station? - "Ichiban chikai eki wa doko desu ka?" - This will work too. And here are some places you might want directions to:

hotel - "hoteru"

airport - "kuukou"

train station - "eki"

supermarket - "suupaa"

bank - "ginko"

ATM machine - "A-T-M" or "kyasshu sabisu koono"

entrance - "iriguchi"

exit - "deguchi"

bathroom - "toire"

taxi stand - "takushi noriba" For using the taxi...

Please drive me to the hotel - "Hoteru e itte kudasai"

Please stop here - "Koko de tomatte kudasai"

When you first get into the taxi, tell them the place you want to go (for example, the hotel's name) followed by "kudasai." Or better yet, carry around the address written in Japanese.

Does this train go to (place)? - "Kono densha wa (place) made ikimasu ka?" Another important question!

Eating And Shopping

... please - "... wo kudasai" - You can use this for anything, food, goods, places you want to go in a taxi. It is the basic way to make any kind of request, and it's very polite.

bill please - "kanjou kudasai" - Most restaurants will give you the bill without being requested, or have it waiting at the counter. You can also make an "x" with your fingers, and this means "bill."

How much is this? - "Kore wa ikura desu ka?"

beer - "biiru" - Probably the most requested thing among western travelers! Because it's...

delicious - "oishii" - Say this a lot and you'll make friends easily.

These basics should be able to take care of your Japan traveling needs! Don't worry, I said before that it's tough sometimes to find people who can speak English. Actually, you can find people who will give it a shot, but it's always good to have some basics in Japanese anyway. Happy travels!

Dealing With Money In Japanese

The first thing you need to know before you get off the plane is how to handle all that yen in your pocket. Trust me, there's plenty of stuff to blow it on in this country; you can buy great stuff just about anywhere. Let's look at how money in Japan works.

First off, it's not actually "yen" but "en." The reason why we say "yen" is that it sometimes sounds like "yen" when pronounced after numbers that end in "i" like "ichi." Before you land at Narita Airport, make sure you've got the pronunciation down - "en."

In Japan, the coins are 1 yen, 5 yen, 10 yen, 50 yen, 100 yen and 500 yen. If there are more, I haven't ever seen them, and I've been here buying stuff and spending money for 12 years! The bills are 1000 yen, 5000 yen and 10,000 yen. There are also some 2000 yen bills floating around.

1,000 yen is "sen-en," 5000 yen is "go-sen-en" and 10,000 is "ichi-man." In Japanese, they go one further than we do in English. We stop at a thousand, and then it becomes "ten thousand." In Japan, "ten thousand" is one "man" (pronounced like "mon"). After so many years over here, I still have trouble counting over 10,000 because of this! 100,000 is "ten man," and so on.

The exchange rate varies, but it usually hovers just above 100 yen for a US dollar. I've seen it as high as 135 to the dollar, and I've also seen it at just 100 to a dollar. In general, you can plan your travel money by thinking of 10,000 yen as \$100. If you do it this way, you'll always have a little extra than what you thought you had.

What all this means is that you end up carrying a lot of change. Think about it - everything under \$10 is change. Be prepared!

Another thing that might surprise you is that people carry lots of cash in Japan. In fact, credit cards are hardly used, and checks are unheard of. Japan is a totally cash based society. It's quite safe to carry big bills; you're only real danger is losing the money yourself! Theft is very rare, and I've heard lots of stories about people losing their wallets and finding them later with the money untouched.

Even at the convenience store, you can buy a 20 yen chocolate with a 10,000 yen bill and the clerk at the counter won't bat an eye. It's not like the States where it can be tough to break a \$20.

Here are some important phrases related to money:

"Ikura desu ka?" -----How much?

"Kore wa ikura desu ka?"-----How much is this?

"Doko de ryougae dekimasu ka?" Where can I change money?

"Kyasshu kona wa doko desu ka?" Where is an ATM machine?

"Ginko wa doko desu ka?" -----Where is a bank?

"Kurejitto kaado wa tsukaemasu ka?" Can I use a credit card?

"o-kane"-----money

"en"-----yen

"doru" -----dollar

"takai" -----expensive

"yasui"-----cheap

"otsuri"-----change

"waribiki"-----discount

"o-make"-----freebie

"han-gaku"-----half-price

"ryou-shuu-sho"-----receipt

"ryoushuusho kudasai" -----Please give me a receipt.

Now, if you really want to save money, stay away from Roppongi. Better yet, just stay away from Tokyo. Everything is expensive! Oh well, it's worth it.

The Basics Of Counting In Japanese

Counting in Japanese is pretty simple, but there are a few things that are different. First off, there are two different number systems. This is one, and it only goes up to 10:

one hitotsu
two futatsu
three mittsu
four yotsu
five itsutsu
six mutsu
seven nanatsu
eight yattsu
nine kokonotsu
ten toh

Sound like a mouthful? Well, I taught you the tough one first. This counting system is not used a lot. It's basically a way for counting things. Here is the more common one. This one is used more in daily life, and is the counting system that dates, time and other important stuff uses:

one ichi
two ni
three san
four yon or shi
five go
six roku
seven shichi or nana
eight hachi
nine ku or kyu
ten ju

For four, seven and nine, you'll see both forms used sometimes. The reason there are two words for "four" is that "shi" in Japanese also means "death." People are a little superstitious about that, so you'll more commonly hear "yon."

This is also why, in Japan, you're never supposed to give anybody four of something. For "nine," "ku" also means "suffering," so some folks prefer to say "kyu." I have no idea why there are two words for "seven."

When you get to ten, it gets even easier...

eleven	ju-ichi
twelve	ju-ni
thirteen	ju-san
fourteen	ju-yon

...and so on. Just put the words in order, and you don't have to change anything. When you get to twenty...

twenty	ni-ju
twenty one	ni-ju-ichi
twenty two	ni-ju-ni

... How can it be so easy!? It's way simpler than our crazy numbers in English.

one hundred	hyaku
two hundred	ni-hyaku
three hundred	san-byaku
four hundred	yon-hyaku

...etc. It turns into "byaku" after a few letters, but if you screw it up (which I always do), everybody will understand you anyway! There are a few others that are irregular, like:

six hundred	roppyaku
eight hundred	happyaku

It's a little like "roku" plus "hyaku," and the "h" becomes a hard "p".

thousand	sen
two thousand	ni-sen
three thousand	san-zen etc.

So, to make big numbers, you simply stack them up:

five hundred sixty seven go-hyaku-roku-ju-nana

three thousand four hundred and seventy two

san-zen, yon-hyaku, nana-ju, ni

sixteen thousand four hundred and seventy seven

ju-roku-sen, yon-hyaku, nana-ju-nana

eight hundred forty seven thousand six hundred ninety one

happyaku-yon-ju-nana-sen, roppyaku-kyu-ju-ichi

... Get the idea? I hope you never have to count that high, but there it is just in case! The nice thing about Japanese is that there are few irregular forms, so you don't have to learn things like "twenty" or "twelve" or "fifty," etc.

The Crazy World Of Japanese Numbers

I wrote already about how to count, but I have to be honest with you... I didn't tell the whole truth. The reason is that it's horribly terribly mind-blowingly difficult to count in Japanese. I wanted to lull you into a false sense of confidence before I dropped the bomb and you entered...

...The Crazy World Of Japanese Numbers!

It's very, very difficult, but after I've explained how it works, I'll show you an easy no-brainer way to count that works perfectly fine.

What's tough about counting in Japanese? They use counters for everything. A "counter" is a unit of something. For example, in English we have a head of lettuce, a pair of scissors, a slice of bread and quite a few others. Well, in Japanese EVERYTHING uses counters like this.

In English, we have lots of things that can be counted without counters. In fact, most things can. A pen, two pens, three pens. But in Japanese there is no other way!

Most of these counters relate to shape. For example, there is a counter that means "long and skinny thing." So, when you count pens, you can't just say "three pens"... you have to say, "three long skinny things of pen." Want to count ten CD's? You have to say, "ten flat things of CD." How about two cars? "Two big things of car."

The trouble is that there are around two hundred of these counters. The good news? Only about 50 are commonly used. Listen to me: "ONLY about 50." So, let's take a look at some common ones:

"hon" - long skinny things like pens, bottles, trains, rivers, guitars.

"mai" - flat things like CD's, photographs, sheets of paper, certain articles of clothing.

"hai" - cups, containers, glasses, octopus (!?), boats. I have no idea how "octopus" got into this category.

"dai" - big things like pianos, cars, machines, elephants, furniture.

"hiki" - small animals like cats, dogs, lizards, hamsters, mice. This one is also used for some insects.

"wa" - birds and rabbits. The word "wa" actually means "wings," so you're saying "four wings of pigeons." So, way back in ancient Japan, whoever started including rabbits in this category never got very close to a rabbit!

"rin" - wheels, flowers and other things that are flat, round and turn.

"soku" - socks, stockings and other things that go on feet.

...And there's more! These counter words attach to the end of the number. For example, for 2 cats, you would say "ni-hiki." Three cars would be "san-dai." Twenty CD's would be "ni-ju-mai."

Just to show you how important this is, let me tell you a funny "stupid foreigner" story about when I first came to Japan. I went to a bar to meet my friend. We were going there for one beer (I'm not a big drinker), and then to head out to dinner. I asked the bartender, "One beer please," but I used the wrong counter. I ordered a huge bottle instead of a glass! I couldn't put away that much beer in a weekend! My friend showed up and thought I'd turned into an alcoholic since he's last seen me.

Before you stress out completely and decide you're just going to spend your time in Japan gesturing and hoping people understand you, I've got a secret to tell you.

There is one easy counter that can be used for anything, and you will not sound like an idiot at all if you use it. It's...

"ko"

...Everything in the world can be "ko." In my years in Japan, I've learned some of the most common of these counters, but I've gotten by most of the time with "ko" and no problems.

Still, it's good to learn some of these. Learn and practice them one at a time, and you'll get the hang of it!

This short report will get you started but there is no substitute for proven learning systems.

For professional Japanese instruction from a Japanese native licensed instructor visit

<http://www.japanteach.com>

Wishing you all the best with your learning to speak Japanese,

Craig