



Japanese QuickChat

Despite appearances, it's not that hard to get a basic grip on the Japanese language. Its pronunciation is fairly easy to master for English speakers – unlike some languages in the Asian region it does not have tones – and the grammar is fairly simple. By taking the time to acquaint yourself with Japan's language you'll also be accessing a vital part of a rich and ancient culture and a modern dynamic society.

QUESTION WORDS

How?	どのように ?	<i>do-no yō</i>
What?	なに?	<i>nani?</i>
When?	いつ?	<i>itsu?</i>
Where?	どこ?	<i>doko?</i>
Who?	だれ?	<i>dare?</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Good Morning	おはようございます	<i>ohayō gozaimas[u]</i>
Goodbye	さようなら	<i>sayōnara</i>
Yes	はい	<i>hai</i>
No	いいえ	<i>iie</i>
Please (when offering)	どうぞ	<i>dōzo</i>
Please (when asking)	お願いします	<i>onegai shimas[u]</i>
Thank you	どうもありがとう	<i>dōmo arigatō</i>
You're welcome	どういたしまして	<i>dō itashimashite</i>
Excuse me/Pardon	すみません	<i>sumimasen</i>
I'm sorry	ごめんなさい	<i>gomen nasai</i>
What's your name?	お名前は何かですか?	<i>o-namae wa nan des[u] ka?</i>
My name is ...	私は...です	<i>watashi wa ... des[u]</i>
Where are you from?	どちらのかたですか	<i>dochira no kata des[u] ka?</i>
Cheers!	乾杯!	<i>kampai!</i>
Is it OK to take a photo?	写真を撮って もいいですか?	<i>shashin o totte mo ii des[u] ka?</i>
Pleased to meet you	どうぞよろしく	<i>dōzo yorosh[i]ku</i>

DIRECTIONS

Where is ...?	...はどこですか?	<i>... wa doko des[u] ka?</i>
Where is this address please?	この住所はどこですか?	<i>kono jūsho wa doko des[u] ka?</i>
Go straight ahead	まっすぐ行って	<i>massugu itte</i>
Turn left/right on the corner at the traffic lights	(左/右)へ曲がって角 その信号を	<i>hidari/migi e magatte ka-do so-no shin-gō o</i>

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you speak English?	英語が話せますか?	<i>eigo ga hanasemas[u] ka?</i>
How do you say ... in Japanese?	日本語で...は何と いいますか?	<i>nihongo de ... wa nan to iimas[u] ka?</i>
What does ... mean?	...はどんな 意味ですか?	<i>... wa donna imi des[u] ka?</i>
I don't understand	わかりません	<i>wakarimasen</i>

TIME & DATES

What time is it?	今何時ですか?	<i>ima nan-ji des[u] ka?</i>
morning	朝	<i>asa</i>
afternoon	昼	<i>hiru</i>
today	今日	<i>kyō</i>
tomorrow	明日	<i>ash[i]ta</i>
yesterday	きのう	<i>kinō</i>
Monday	月曜日	<i>getsuyōbi</i>
Tuesday	火曜日	<i>kayōbi</i>
Wednesday	水曜日	<i>suiyōbi</i>
Thursday	木曜日	<i>mokuyōbi</i>
Friday	金曜日	<i>kinyōbi</i>
Saturday	土曜日	<i>dōyōbi</i>
Sunday	日曜日	<i>nichiyōbi</i>

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buyを買いたいです	<i>... o kaitai des[u]</i>
How much is it?	いくらですか?	<i>ikura des[u] ka?</i>
I'm just looking	見ているだけです	<i>miteiru dake des[u]</i>
It's cheap	安いです	<i>yasui des[u]</i>
It's too expensive	高すぎます	<i>taka-sugi mas[u]</i>
I'll take this one	これをください	<i>kore o kudasai</i>
Can I have a receipt?	領収書をいた だけませんか?	<i>ryōshūsho o itadakemasen ka?</i>
Do you accept credit cards?	クレジットカード で支払えますか?	<i>ku-re-jit-to-kā-do deshi-ha-ra-e-mas ka</i>

PLACES

bank	銀行	<i>ginkō</i>
city centre	市の中心	<i>shi no chū-shin</i>
embassy	大使館	<i>taishi-kan</i>
market	市場	<i>ichiba</i>
museum	博物館	<i>ha-ku-bu-tsu-kan</i>
post office	郵便局	<i>yūbin kyoku</i>
toilet	お手洗い/トイレ	<i>o-tearai/toire</i>
tourist office	観光案内所	<i>kankō annaijo</i>

TRANSPORT

What time does the next ... leave?	次の...は何時 に出ますか?	<i>tsugi no ... wa nanji ni demas[u] ka?</i>
What time does the next ... arrive?	次の...は何時 に着きますか?	<i>tsugi no ... wa nanji ni tsukimas[u] ka?</i>
boat	ボート/船	<i>bōto/fune</i>
bus (city)	市バス	<i>shibas[u]</i>
taxi	タクシー	<i>takushi</i>
train	電車	<i>densha</i>
How much is the fare to ...?	...までいくらですか?	<i>... made ikura des[u] ka?</i>
I like to go toに行きたいです	<i>... ni ikitai desu</i>
Please take me to (this address)	(この住所)までお 願います	<i>(kono jūsho) made onegai shimas[u]</i>
Please stop here	ここで停めてください	<i>koko de tomete kudasai</i>
bus stop	バス停	<i>basutei</i>
ticket office	切符売り場	<i>kippu uriba</i>
timetable	時刻表	<i>jikokuhyō</i>
station	駅	<i>eki</i>

EMERGENCIES

Help!	助けて!	<i>tas[u]ketel!</i>
I'm lost	道に迷いました	<i>michi ni mayoi mash[i]ta</i>
Go away!	離れろ!	<i>hanarero!</i>
Call a doctor!	医者を呼んで ください!	<i>isha o yonde kudasai!</i>
Call an ambulance!	救急車を呼んで	<i>kyūkyūsha o yonde!</i>
Call the police!	警察を呼んで ください!	<i>keisatsu o yonde kudasai!</i>

SIGNS

Information	案内所	
Open	営業中	
Closed	準備中	
Entrance	入口	
Exit	出口	
Toilets	お手洗い/トイレ	
Male	男	
Female	女	



GRAMMAR

To English speakers, Japanese language patterns often seem to be back to front and lacking in essential information. For example, where an English speaker would say 'I'm going to the shop' a Japanese speaker would say 'shop to going', omitting the subject pronoun (I) altogether and putting the verb at the end of the sentence.

To make matters worse, many moods which are indicated at the beginning of a sentence in English occur at the end of a sentence in Japanese, as in the Japanese sentence 'Japan to going if' – 'if you're going to Japan'. Fortunately for visitors to Japan, it's not all bad news. In fact, with a little effort, getting together a repertoire of travellers' phrases should be no trouble – the only problem will be understanding the replies you get.

WRITTEN JAPANESE

Japanese has one of the most complex writing systems in the world, which uses three different scripts – four if you include the increasingly used Roman script *romaji*.

The most difficult of the three, for foreigners and Japanese alike, is kanji, the ideographic script developed by the Chinese. Not only do you have to learn a couple of thousand of them, but unlike Chinese many Japanese *kanji* have wildly variant pronunciations depending on context. Due to the differences between Chinese and Japanese grammar, *kanji* had to be supplemented with a 'syllabary' (an alphabet of syllables), known as *hiragana*.

And there is yet another syllabary that is used largely for representing foreign loan words such as *terebi* (TV) and *biiru* (beer); this script is known as *katakana*. If you're serious about learning to read Japanese you'll have to set aside several years. If you're thinking of tackling the Japanese writing system before you go or while you're in Japan, your best bet would be to start with *hiragana* or *katakana*. Both these syllabaries have 48 characters each, and can be learned within a week, although it'll take at least a month to consolidate them. Once in the country, you can practise your *katakana* on restaurant menus, where such things as *kôhii* (coffee) and *kēiki* (cake) are frequently found. Practise your *hiragana* on train journeys, as station names are usually indicated in *hiragana* (in addition to English and *kanji*).

ROMANISATION

The *romaji* used in this guide follows the Hepburn system of romanisation.

Hepburn *romaji* is a direct system of Romanisation that doesn't fully reflect all elements of spoken Japanese. The most obvious of these is the tendency in everyday speech to omit the vowel 'u' in many instances. In this language guide, these silent letters have been retained to provide accuracy in the written Romanisations, but they have been enclosed in square brackets to aid accurate pronunciation.

PRONUNCIATION

Unlike other languages in the region with complicated tonal systems (eg Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai), Japanese pronunciation is fairly easy to master. The following examples reflect British pronunciation:

a	as in 'father'
e	as in 'get'
i	as in 'macaroni'
o	as in 'bone'
u	as in 'flu'

Vowels appearing in this book with a macron (or bar) over them (ā, ē, ō, ū) are pronounced in the same way as standard vowels except that the sound is held twice as long. You need to take care with this as vowel length can change the meaning of a word, eg *yuki* means 'snow', while *yūki* means 'bravery'. Consonants are generally pronounced as in English, with the following exceptions:

f	this sound is produced by pursing the lips and blowing lightly
g	as in 'get' at the start of word; and nasalised as the 'ng' in 'sing' in the middle of a word
r	more like an 'l' than an 'r'

TRYING ENGLISH IN JAPAN

Visitors to Japan should be warned that many Japanese do not speak or understand much English. Although English is a required subject in both junior high school and high school, and many students go on to study more of it in university, several factors conspire to prevent many Japanese from acquiring usable English.

These include the nature of the English educational system, which uses outdated methods like translation; the extreme difference between English and Japanese pronunciation and grammar; and the typical reticence of the Japanese, who may be shy to speak a language that they haven't mastered.

There are several ways to facilitate communication with Japanese who may not have a mastery of spoken English:

- Always start with a smile to create a sense of ease.
- Speak very slowly and clearly.
- When asking for information, choose people of university age or thereabouts, as these people are most likely to speak some English. Also, Japanese women tend to speak and understand English much better than Japanese men.
- If necessary, write down your question; Japanese are often able to understand written English even when they can't understand spoken English.
- Use the sample phrases in this chapter and, if necessary, point to the Japanese phrase in question.