

DJT GUIDE TO JAPANESE

出来ないのか？



Introduction

Traveling to Japan to talk with natives, watching raw anime, and reading manga and novels before they're translated all require the same fundamental skills and knowledge. While this guide is not going to be enough to teach you these skills, it will give you an idea of how to go about acquiring them.

With the basics covered in this guide you can get started with reading the written language, which you can then use to gain a more thorough understanding of Japanese. That being said, you should not hesitate to practice listening or speaking if you wish to do so. This guide only aims to introduce you to the Japanese language and show you how to get started. The rest is up to you.

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Japanese writing system

The Japanese writing system consists of three scripts: hiragana, katakana and kanji.

The kana

Hiragana and katakana, together referred to as the kana, are two phonetic scripts, each containing 46 characters. They represent the same sounds, but are used for different purposes.

Hiragana (ひらがな) is used for grammatical parts and words which have no kanji form, or which the writer chooses not to use kanji for. Katakana (カタカナ) is used for loanwords and emphasis (similar to italics), among other purposes. For more information, see Tae Kim's articles on [hiragana](#) and [katakana](#).

Hiragana will be your bread and butter for reading anything in Japanese. The approach to Japanese presented in this guide, as well as all the resources linked (except for those about the kana), are intended for people who can at least read hiragana. Thus, hiragana is the first thing that you are expected you learn.

Kanji

[Kanji](#) are the third part of the Japanese writing system, and by far the most extensive. These logographic characters of varying complexity represent words or parts of words in conjunction with the kana. Japanese high school students are required to learn at least 2136 kanji as part of the curriculum, but around 3,000 are used in all facets of life.

To get an idea of how the writing system looks in practice, see the following image:



Learning Japanese

Grammar

Learning grammar is straightforward: Pick a grammar guide and read it. [Tae Kim](#) is often recommended for beginners (note that the whole guide is basic grammar, even the “advanced” section), but other options are listed on the [resources page](#). You shouldn't expect to memorise everything you read the first time around in whatever guide you choose, but you *should* be aiming to understand it (try asking in the thread if you are struggling). The purpose of a grammar guide is not to grant you “mastery” over the language (which only comes through lots of practice and exposure), but simply to introduce you to the fundamentals of the language and give you the foundation that you need to start reading native material.

Once you've reached the end of the guide, you can start reading Japanese material while consulting back to the guide to solidify your memory. By reading Japanese you are actively practicing your grammar since you are using it constantly to understand what you are reading. Manga is the common recommendation for first getting into reading, especially [Yotsubato](#). You may also consider doing the [Dictionary of Japanese Grammar Anki deck](#) to reinforce what you have learned.

This isn't the end of grammar. Tae Kim should serve you fine for the easiest manga, but it only covers the most common grammar. The Dictionaries of Japanese Grammar are the go-to resource for anything not covered in Tae Kim; they and various other options are documented in the [resources section](#). If you're looking to reinforce or refresh what you learned in Tae Kim, then the [Visualizing Japanese Grammar](#) video series (written and presented by a native Japanese linguist) is an excellent resource.

Vocabulary

[Anki](#) is a flashcard program that helps you acquire vocabulary through [spaced repetition](#). It is commonly used in conjunction with the [Core2K/6K](#) vocabulary deck by beginners to build up a basic vocabulary of common words in preparation for reading. Many people stop the Core2K/6K deck after reaching 2000 words; partly because the first 2000 words (Core2K) are a lot more common than the rest, and partly because of the significant time investment involved in completing Core6K. As you can expect even Core2K to take about 3 months to complete, some prefer to skip it and begin reading native material immediately. Whether or not you feel that the time investment is worth it depends on your tolerance for looking up unknown words. After finishing Core2K, you'll at least know the majority of words in a given sentence, but you will still have to look up many words per page.

After completing Core2K (or skipping it entirely), most people begin a "mining deck". A mining deck is a vocabulary deck which you build up yourself with the unknown words that you encounter while reading. The Firefox add-on [Yomichan](#) simplifies this process to a single click, so that all you need to do to add a card to your deck is hover over a word, mouse into the popup and click the + button.

Listening Comprehension

Developing listening comprehension skills will take hundreds (if not thousands) of hours of dedicated listening to native Japanese content (though listening to things in the background while you're busy doing other tasks can be helpful too). Generally speaking, listening to music does not count as listening practice because it sounds nothing like real, conversational Japanese. The content you use for listening practice should consist of native Japanese people speaking to one another at native speed, else it will be of little use to you. Be aware that when watching video content, you will want to disable any English subtitles as you will quickly stop paying attention to what you're hearing and just focus your attention on reading the subtitles

instead, regardless of your initial intentions. Japanese subtitles can be helpful in figuring out any lines you're struggling to understand, but leaving the subtitles on all the time may become a crutch and give you the illusion that you're comprehending things that you really aren't. Japanese subs are hard to come by in any case, and are often error-ridden, so it is best you learn to make do without them (real life has no subtitles, after all).

Writing system

You will need to learn all three writing systems to be able to read native material. Since hiragana and katakana are relatively small in number and simple in design, they can be learned through rote repetition in a short time-frame using a site like [DJT Kana](#). For kanji, however, because of their great number and complexity, there are various opinions on how to best approach them.

None of the methods described below are objectively superior to the others. The most important thing about any given method is not how "efficient" it is, but whether or not you enjoy it, or at the very least feel motivated enough to see it through to completion. Don't be afraid to try out different methods and see what works best for you.

Benefits and drawbacks of isolated kanji study

There are two main ways to approach kanji. The simplest is to learn whole words without studying the individual kanji. The other is to study each kanji in isolation to learn its meaning and composition. Studying isolated kanji can grant you the ability to write by hand, and will likely make learning vocabulary easier. It's up to you to decide whether you'll benefit enough from learning kanji in isolation to merit the time and effort it takes.

Bear in mind that recognition and production are separate skills. Practicing one will make the other easier, but fluent recognition requires recognition practice, and the same goes for production if you wish to learn it.

Kanji through vocabulary

If you choose not to study kanji in isolation, you will still learn to recognize their meanings and readings as you learn new words. Learning new words is something you need to do anyway, so many people skip individual kanji study altogether. Either approach will result in success so long as you persist, so the choice comes down to what method you personally find easier. If you don't want to study kanji, you can likely work through a vocab deck without doing so. But if you are slow to pick up on kanji while learning vocabulary or have poor retention, consider studying kanji individually.

Isolated kanji (mnemonics)


The mnemonics method uses short stories or images to break down the kanji and make them easy to remember. Commonly used resources that encourage mnemonics are [Remembering](#)

[the Kanji](#), [KanjiDamage](#) and the Kodansha Kanji Learner's Course. Each has its own set of mnemonics and slightly distinct methods, so you should glance through each and pick whichever suits you — it's ultimately not that important. For more information on how to use these RTK, KD, or KKLC, and the necessary Anki decks, see the [resources](#) page.

Isolated kanji (rote)

Kanji can also be learnt simply by writing or reviewing them repetitively. You should first familiarize yourself with [radicals](#), as explained in "[Radical approach](#)" below. As with learning vocab, Anki would be very conducive to this method (use either a [KKLC or RTK deck](#) and just ignore the mnemonics, if present). The general consensus is that the [readings](#) for the characters [should be learned through vocabulary](#), so you should just focus on associating each kanji with its meaning(s). If you're struggling with a particular kanji, don't be afraid to make up a mnemonic based on its radicals.

Radical approach

宀 + 夕 + 巳 = 宛 

For those who feel that methods like RTK and KanjiDamage take too much time, but don't feel confident diving head-first into kanji as with the kanji-through-vocab approach described above, one method to consider is simply dedicating a week or two to studying [radicals](#) - the 200 or so building-blocks which make up the kanji. This approach, rather than teaching you to write and recognise a set of ~2000 common kanji, gives your brain the information it needs to mentally deconstruct the kanji it encounters into their base components, which may make it easier for you to both learn to recognise them and to avoid mixing them up with other kanji which look similar. In any case, it should stop your brain from seeing them as simply a bunch of random squiggles. You can find an Anki deck [here](#) which contains all of the radicals, along with their meanings in English.

I read up to here, now what do I do to actually learn Japanese?

Having reached this part of the guide, you probably have an idea of what Japanese is. This section will show you the standard course of action for getting started with actually learning it.

1. Lookup a chart of hiragana and katakana (such as these: [hiragana](#) / [katakana](#)) and write each kana down a few times. You can practice with [DJT Kana](#). Make sure that you have a firm grasp on hiragana before moving on to the next step. Katakana is also important, but it's fine to move on to the next step without having as firm a grasp on katakana.
2. [Core2K/6K](#) is the generally recommended Anki deck for beginners who want to build up a basic vocabulary before they start reading. Learn how to use it from the [Anki startup guide](#). You should also install [Yomichan](#) (Firefox & Chrome), which will allow you to look up words by hovering over them.
3. *(Optional)* If you wish to study kanji or radicals individually, pick one of the methods discussed [above](#). You can do so either before starting vocab or at the same time, but you should try to finish up in a few months so you can focus on vocabulary.
4. Since you will probably be learning vocabulary alongside grammar, it is important that you pace yourself. This does not mean that you should not push yourself though. You can change the amount of new cards a day in Anki, but leave it at the default amount for the first few days and see how it suits you. Raise the amount of cards if you feel like you have headroom, and lower it if you feel overwhelmed (or just push yourself harder). Once you get into the swing of things, your total cards to review will be around ten times the amount of your new cards per day (so 20 new cards per day would mean about 200 reviews per day). **You should set the upper limit for daily reviews in the deck options to the highest number possible**, because failing to do all of your reviews on schedule will interfere with Anki's spaced-repetition-system. If you have trouble keeping up, lower the amount of new cards instead of limiting your reviews.

5. To learn grammar, [Tae Kim's Grammar Guide](#) is generally recommended due to its brevity (other options can be found in the [resources section](#)). Read the entire guide, including the "Advanced grammar" section - it's all actually basic Japanese grammar. If you are struggling to understand Tae Kim's explanation about a particular grammatical concept, look it up in the [Dictionary of Japanese Grammar](#).
6. Once you have read through your chosen grammar guide, you are ready to start reading Japanese. While it's not necessary, reading will be easier if you have reached about 1000 - 2000 words in Core2K/6K at this point (you will have to look up a lot of words anyway, but having a basic vocabulary will make it less painful). If you intend to start reading with Yotsubato, download the [Yotsuba Reading Pack](#), which will introduce you to all of the vocabulary used in the first volume of Yotsuba; this is particularly helpful for slang and slurred speech that can't be looked up in a dictionary. If you find your chosen reading material boring, drop it and find something else. Nothing will make you want to quit learning a language faster than boring input. The thing you're reading should make *you* want to read *it*.
7. At this point most people start a mining deck. A mining deck is a vocabulary deck to which you add unfamiliar words that you encounter while reading. You can also continue with the Core deck if you like, but it makes sense to create a mining deck once you start reading. To make mining easier, use [Yomichan's](#) Anki integration, which allows you to create a new Anki card with a single key click ([instructions](#)).
8. Read more. Reading will be slow in the beginning, but the more you practice the better you will get at it. Ask in the thread if you have a question about some part that you are having trouble understanding.
9. Enjoy compelling content.

A note on listening and production: The method described above works well for learning to read Japanese. Japanese is easiest to approach when written, since looking up vocabulary is simple and there is no pressure on the amount of time a person may take to understand something. Understanding spoken Japanese is more difficult because the listener must discern all the words spoken and process them in a short time, or else he will lose track of what is being said. Production is even more difficult, since information must be processed, considered and then an answer must be produced, all in a short span of time. The only way to improve in these aspects is practice.

This guide will not provide any strategies for practicing listening or production, but you will find various resources for that in the [resources](#) document.

Resources

The resources section can be found [here](#).

Questions & Thread Etiquette

>The Daily Japanese Thread

We have a thread at almost all times, because shitposting about studying is more important than studying. If there isn't a thread up, you can make one with the template below.

Please be on your best behavior, and try not to bring elements of your native-board culture into the thread, or any other low-level internet trash if you can abstain from it (/jp/ and /a/ things included). Also, please do not promote any memes.

If you refer people to this thread, please do not do it on a poor-quality board, such as [any board], and if you do, make sure the person you refer is at least somewhat intelligent, and the thread isn't a poor one.

Please do not engage in lengthy and fruitless arguments, especially those unrelated to the thread subject. Be the bigger man, and be the first to discontinue the argument. Alternatively continue it in Japanese.

Please do not label anything as "shit", especially anything controversial, such as writing. In the case of writing, the reasons for one to do it are subjective, and while it may or may not be useful to you, the other person may or may not find it to be useful or unuseful to them. Recognize what is opinion, and what is fact. Submit to the fact that what is subjective, holds no real truth.

>I have a question.

Does it matter (Is it a Y/N question or a binary question' (e.g. Tae Kim or Genki?); Is it a lazy question where you're asking whether you should learn something or not; could you have easily found your answer yourself; Will this just lead to an argument)? Not all questions need answers or have them.

>Is this a shitpost?

If you have to ask yourself, it probably is.

See the tips below on how to identify a shitpost:

>calls the community made guide/whatever method a piece of shit with no reasoning given why

>insults someone giving helpful advice with no reasoning given why

>attempts to create arguments over virtually nothing (eg opinions without facts)

>"spam questions" that are easily answered via a 1 second glance at the guide

>uses obtuse Japanese fragments interspersed with English to attempt bypass people trying to filter the shitposts

>any mention of anime being shit, or "real Japanese"

>spells the word as romanji

>How long does it take to learn Japanese?

A very long time.

Many in the DJT threads say that, at a good pace, fluency is achievable in 4 years. Thinking in terms of "I have 4 years to become fluent" may help to prevent you from making the common beginner mistake of rushing, crashing and burning due to short term thinking (e.g. setting your new cards/day limit to 100 in Anki because you think it is taking too long to get through your deck, then finding yourself totally overwhelmed in a week's time and giving up).

>Namasensei

[<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9987A659670D60E0>]

Namasensei is often watched by beginners learning Japanese, because his alcohol-fueled antics are strangely both entertaining and powerfully motivating for some anons. Unfortunately, this is a double-edged sword; as he's always shitfaced drunk, tends to teach in an ineffective fashion, has terrible handwriting, and messes up the stroke order of some of the kana.

[His te-form video teaches you that the te-form is the command form, which is misleading and will cause you a great deal of confusion if you actually try to read anything with that assumption. It will also confuse you when you read a grammar guide and see it being explained as having a completely different function (a conjunction used to make compound sentences). When the te-form appears to be being used to make a (light) command, what is really going on is that "てください" is being contracted to just "て".]

>Using Google for Japanese:

set your search to google.co.jp for (much) better results

>I can't figure out what this means

Google 「X」, 「X」とは, or 「X」という言葉(の使い方) where X is your inquiry. 「x」ってどういう意味, の意味 etc. also yields results.

>How to find reading materials?

Search for the Japanese title in Japanese along with the keywords 一般小説 青空文庫形式 txt

P2P: Nyaa, Share, Perfect Dark

>I don't seem to have the motivation to do this

>You can't learn Japanese.

>What is the difference between x and y?

Searching google for 「x と y の違い」 or 「"x" "y" "違い"」 will usually find you the answer you're looking for. If you can't understand the answer you find, you aren't on a level where you should worry about the difference of x and y yet.

>When should I start reading?

Whenever you feel like it. Though it is recommended that you have a Tae Kim level of grammar and a vocab base of the 2000 most common words before you start reading.

>は vs が

The Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar (see Grammar on [DJT page](#)) has one of the best explanations on the matter and is relatively concise. A great (but very long) explanation can also be found in Making Sense of Japanese Grammar - What the Textbooks Don't Tell You (available in the CoR). I would refer to those, and take all others with a grain a salt or not at all.

<http://Japanese.about.com/library/weekly/aa051301a.htm>

>How many words do natives know?

小学生レベル: 5千~2万語	Elementary School Level:	5-20 thousand
中学生レベル: 2万~4万語	Middle School Level:	20-40 thousand
高校生レベル: 4万~4万5千語	High School Level:	40-45 thousand
大学生レベル: 4万5千~5万語	College Level:	45-50 thousand

Source: <http://www.kecl.ntt.co.jp/icl/lirg/resources/goitokusei/goi-test.html>

Words only include the dictionary form. Proper nouns and compound words are excluded. For a different study addressing the related question of how many words you need to know to achieve adequate comprehension, see: <https://i.imgur.com/Fqm6ma8.png>

>These two words have the same reading, and meaning. How do I distinguish them, and why is Japan trying to fuck me?

They have the same *English* meaning. Which, in case you couldn't guess it, means you've gotta look it up in a J>J dictionary, or otherwise perform a Google search. If your grammar isn't at a level where you can understand the descriptions, or distinctions you should be bettering your grammar instead of your vocab. If you can only read English definitions, then assume they are flawed before assuming that you've been fucked.

>How do I choose which kanji reading to use? Should I learn onyomi and kunyomi of kanji?

Readings for words are usually clearly defined, and any of the dictionaries in the sections above will tell you how a word is read. For more in-depth information on readings, refer to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanji#Readings>

Learning the readings of kanji individually is generally considered a waste of time, since there's no fixed rule on what reading a kanji takes in words. For knowing how to read words you encounter, learn vocab.

>What's this WaniKani thing?

WaniKani is a paid website which teaches you 6000 words and 2000 kanji. This may seem like a nice prospect, but reality is that the free open source software Anki will accomplish exactly the same for you. WaniKani limits your potential by providing you with a fixed schedule that you cannot exceed. With Anki, you can learn at whatever pace you wish and it does not cost you anything. Anki is also highly modular and can be adjusted to suit your preferences, while WaniKani offers next to no customization.

Does this sound biased to you? It certainly is. But it is an undeniable fact that Anki offers customization and pacing of your own learning and is free, whereas WaniKani costs you money and forces you to go slowly. If you still want to use WaniKana's content, there is a free Anki deck in the CoR.

>Individual kanji study - production or recognition?

It probably goes without saying that learning to recognise the meanings of a kanji does not equate to learning how to write it, but what might be less obvious is that learning to produce a kanji often does not equate to learning how to recognise it. If you begin by studying only production, there will be times when you spot a character and think "Ah, I know this one!", but be unable to recall its meaning. In short, learning one skill will aid in learning the other, but to 'master' either skill requires dedicated practice of that skill.

So what reason is there to do production if you don't care about writing? As it gives you a more intimate understanding of the kanji, it will likely aid in your ability to distinguish similar-looking characters and read messy fonts, but it is a very time-consuming skill to learn so it's up to you to decide if it's worth it.

Misc.

If you have any ideas you would like to discuss, leave a suggestion or post in the thread.

A note of gratitude:

- To the creator of the original guide, upon the structure of which this guide is based.
- To the anons who corrected my language, provided ideas, and made suggestions.
- To all those who contributed to the resources document.

Thank you.

Header PSD file (*including font*)

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/1471453/DJT%20Header.zip>

Previous version of current guide:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G5C7fCe07CDzYalZYObzvx_fw7RUNsLHiMAY-t7FA/edit

Old guide:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QkKNc3AYP5sOv23FRjBoCs2dDzHN83BuT1T_aRU21t0/edit

To contact the maintainer, leave a suggestion on the guide or post in the DJT thread.

An additional note:

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You are free to create an entirely new guide for the DJT, to make an improved one based on this document or to do whatever else you think would make this document a better one without crediting the author(s). You may have not conceived of or written the words in this guide, but please treat them as if you did. Ideas belong to everyone.

Happy learning.

