

Japanese is Possible!

Lesson 2

Some helpful tips

Your brain is a very powerful tool, even more than you realize. You can learn new things, and unlearn things that were in error. Unlearning in particular tends to require a lot of repetition. You must beat the corrected information into your head, just as the falsehood was beat into your head over a period of years. Eventually, you'll prevail.

In learning Japanese (and this goes for almost any goal you set), the sooner you can unlearn that "it's hard" the sooner you'll be able to make rapid progress. If you've already taken my word for it and believe it, good for you.

At first, Japanese may sound very foreign to you, and your confidence may falter at times. As you begin to listen to it and learn more about it, you will become more comfortable with it. I speak from experience on this.

I strongly suggest that you "make friends" with the Japanese language. Don't treat it as a monster you wish to tame, but rather approach it like a friend and an ally, something you want to do, a fun hobby that you only approach when you want to. Try to rekindle the love of learning that children have. Some of you still have that love of learning, and that's great.

If you treat Japanese like a chore, it will be much harder to learn. Let's think of Japanese study as something fun you will do alongside your favorite hobby - anime, video games, music, or talking for that matter. You will get more enjoyment out of any one of these.

There are many "resources" you can use in the study of Japanese, each giving you practice in one or two particular areas. For example, listening to Japanese music helps you in the following areas:

- Getting rid of the "foreign" feel
- Learning new words (and remembering them well)
- Learning pronunciation

As this column progresses, I will point out the best ways to improve yourself in each area.

Don't worry about what you don't know, but rather focus on what you do know. Take it one step at a time. "Rome wasn't built in a day", as the saying goes. On the other hand, it's very fun to look back at how far you've come in a week, month, or year!

If you're not used to learning things on your own, don't worry. I'll help you out as much as any teacher or professor. Also, the people in this site's forum are always eager to help people with any questions they have. Remember that even in a classroom environment, it's still up to you to learn. If you don't apply yourself in a class, you fail to learn anything. Conversely, if you study outside of class, and do your homework, you will end up with an A. Why not just study on your own

to begin with? As long as you have the materials and the guidance, you should be able to make impressive progress.

There will be more specific tips as the lessons progress. For instance, when studying word lists, early morning is the best time. That is because your brain, like wet cement, is VERY receptive to new information at that time. Have you ever awakened to a horrible song on your alarm clock radio, and then tried to get it out of your head? It's almost impossible. This works to your advantage when you are trying to memorize something. If you set aside at least 5 or 10 minutes in the morning, you will notice the difference. Studies have found that school kids do better in their 1st hour classes for the same reason.

First steps in learning Japanese

Getting the Right Mindset

Unless you watch a lot of subtitled anime, you probably aren't very familiar with Japanese, and it probably sounds foreign to you. When you hear it, your instinct is to ignore it as a "foreign" language. You must try to think of Japanese dialog as simply, "words I don't know yet". In other words, you must believe that "Japanese is Possible".

Realize How Much Time You Have to Learn

You may think you have very little time, but you might be surprised how much time you can scrape together. Important parts of learning Japanese, such as "Word Lists" can be done anytime, anywhere. You only need 10 seconds in a row to look at a list and study some words! Other things can be done at the same time as other things. You can listen to Japanese music or Anime while surfing the Web, for example.

Start thinking about how you could manage your time better, to give yourself some time each day to study. Not much time is required - just enough to look at a word list a few times, read part of a "Learn Japanese" book, or watch a subtitled Anime. (That part won't take too much discipline!)

The idea is to do a little bit every day. We've all heard the fable of "The Tortoise and the Hare". Indeed, when learning a language, "Slow and steady wins the race".

Here's an interesting analogy I found on the Internet on managing your time:

(by James R. Beach)

A professor walks into the room carrying an empty 10-gallon water jug and dragging an obviously heavy bag. He places them on the teacher's desk. Without a word, he begins placing white rocks, just big enough to fit through the mouth of the jug, into the jug until they reach the very top. "Is it full?" he asks. The class nods.

"Maybe not," he says. He then stuffs tiny pebbles into the jug and the pebbles find their way through the cracks in the rock. "Full now?" he asks. The whole class nods.

He then shovels sand into the jug, occasionally shaking the jug, and the tiny grains sift through the rocks and pebbles. "OK," he says, "now is it full?" The class nods in unison.

He smiles. He then slowly pours water into the jug until a water glass is finally empty.

"The lesson here," he says, "is that there is always more room in our lives than we think there is. When you think you're out of time, there is still more available if you look for it."

Here's the time-saving payoff:

The ROCKS are the important things we have to accomplish regularly to be successful. They go into our "time jug" first, because they are most important. The PEBBLES represent those things we may not like to do, but we must do. They go in next. The SAND represents things that we should do, we may even like to do, but they're not as important. The WATER represents the few remaining things that make a difference. If you reverse the order, putting in the water, then the sand, then the pebbles, there will not be enough room for the rocks. So prioritize your activities and make sure the rocks go on your schedule first.

So the moral is, whether Japanese is a rock or the water, there's always space for even a little bit of it in your day, as long as you're ready to do it when the opportunity comes.

Rent some anime DVDs.

Whether you are an anime fan or not, it can be a serious help for your study of Japanese, especially if you don't have any other resource for listening to Japanese dialogue. Anime DVDs are great because they almost always have the Japanese speech available. If you don't have a DVD player, you might be able to rent subtitled anime on tape and you can definitely buy it. Chances are slim that you won't find anything that you don't enjoy at least a little bit, so give it a try, it's a very useful method.

For instance, you can pause the tape or DVD and look up a word you don't know in a Japanese dictionary. You can then write the word on a list so you can learn it! If it was used in an Anime, it's probably a good word to learn. On the other hand, writing down random words from a Japanese dictionary is a horribly inefficient way of building a vocabulary. (Don't laugh...many people have tried it!) I will focus on vocabulary building again in lesson four

If you don't know where to start with anime buying, here are some tips. You can get Anime at Best Buy, Media Play, and other like stores. Also check small hobby shops. If you happen to live in the vicinity of a Yaohan (Japanese mall-like place) you should definitely stop by and see what they have there! If you don't have a store that sells Anime in your vicinity, you can always turn to the Internet. We don't have any links right now, but we may soon.

Remember, it's up to you to work on learning Japanese. I can guide you, but I can't force you to learn.

Next week - Japanese pronunciation

Other areas will be discussed as well, so don't miss it!

