



Learn Japanese Pod Podcasts 10 Tips for studying Japanese

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Introduction

In this podcast, Asuka and I go through our top 10 tips for learning Japanese. These show notes summarise those tips and also include the example dialog you can hear in the [podcast here](#).

Podcast Dialog

Asuka	おはようございます	ohayō gozaimasu	Good morning
Alex	おはようございます	ohayō gozaimasu	Good morning
Asuka	昨日のパーティー楽しかったですね	kinō no paatii tanoshikatta desu ne	Yesterday's party was fun
Alex	楽しかったですね	tanoshikatta desu ne	It was fun wasn't it?
Asuka	またやりましょう	mata yarimashō	Let's do it again
Alex	ぜひ!	zehi	Absolutely!

Top 10 Tips for studying Japanese

Tip # 1 - Set a clear goal

This one is pretty obvious. Before you start anything, you should set a clear goal, preferably with a deadline. This will help to really focus your studies. If you're not sure what your goal is, simply ask yourself "why do I want to study Japanese?"

Do you want to visit Japan on holiday? Do you want to be able to read your favorite manga? Or perhaps you want to become a ninja. Depending on that answer, you can focus more effectively on a study plan.

That might be obvious to you but it is worth saying. And there is one more reason to have a clear goal that people sometimes forget about.

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And that is, setting a goal avoids wasting time studying stuff you don't need to know. If your goal is to visit Japan for a week on holiday, then you should just be studying simple phrases for booking tickets, asking directions and perhaps shopping. You don't need waste your time studying 2500 kanji from a dusty textbook for that.

So, why do you want to study Japanese? Think about it and leave a comment below.

On to my next tip.

Tip # 2 - Know your everyday expressions

For those of you who want to visit Japan, work here and be able to hold a conversation in Japanese, learning high frequency everyday expressions is a great place to start. You should know greetings for different times of day, asking how people are and how to say please and thank you.

For example:

おはようございます	ohayō gozaimasu	Good morning
こんにちは	Konnichi wa	Hello (Used around midday)
こんばんは	Konban wa	Good evening
お元気ですか	ogenki desu ka	How are you?
元気です	genki desu	I'm fine
お願いします	onegai shimasu	Please (Could you do something for me?)
ありがとうございます	arigatō gozaimasu	Thank you
どういたしまして	dō itashi mashite	You're welcome

Tip # 3 - Learn expressions that don't translate easily into English

After learning some basic daily expressions you should learn phrases that don't easily translate into English. In other words, learn phrases that give you a deeper insight into Japanese culture. This also helps you to stop translating words from your own language into Japanese which wastes time and makes you sound unnatural. Here are some examples:

お先に失礼します - osaki ni shitsurei shimasu

This means something like, "I'm sorry for leaving before you". You say this when you are the first person leaving work or some engagement with a group of people.



お疲れ様です - otsukare sama

This literally means, "you must be tired". It is used in various situations but means something like good job, or well done. You use it to express your appreciation for someone after they have exerted a lot of effort for something. It can also be used when someone finishes work and goes home for the day.

You often hear the last two phrases together like this.

A: お先に失礼します - Right, I'm off (Excuse me for leaving first)

B: お疲れ様です - Bye (Good job)

これからよろしくお願いします - kore kara yoroshiku onegaishimasu

The word "yoroshiku" means something like good or please treat me well. So this phrase is could be used to mean "I look forward to working with you" or "I look forward to doing something with you in the future". It's used a lot at the end of a self introduction.

いただきます - itadakimasu

The closest phrase I could think of would be "bon appetite". You say it before eating, usually at home when someone has cooked for you. Itadakimasu literally means "I receive". It's not only used for food but 9 times out of 10 you'll hear it before people eat.

ごちそうさまです - gochisō sama desu

This basically means "That was delicious". You use it after you've eaten to show your appreciation for having received the food and that it was delicious.

All of these phrase teach you the deeper cultural values of the Japanese and give you a glimpse into the way they interact with each other. This isn't a complete list but it's a good place to start.

Learn these phrases well young Jedi.

Tip # 4 - Drill common speech patterns

If you only learn one thing this from this lesson, learn this: Drill, drill and drill again common speech patterns. This is perhaps the single most effective method I used to develop my own fluency in Japanese. It's not rocket science or anything new, but it does work. You just have to do it.

It's super simple. Just choose a phrase, say it over and over again and just change one word every time. In that way, you practice the pattern until you can say it without thinking and you also expand your vocabulary at the same time.



For example, let's learn how to say "where is..." so and so in Japanese which is... "...はどこですか" (...wa doko desu ka)

Now, let's drill and change one word every time.

銀行はどこですか？	ginkō wa doko desu ka	Where is the bank ?
郵便局はどこですか？	yūbinkyoku wa doko desu ka	Where is the post office ?
駅はどこですか？	eki wa doko desu ka	Where is the station ?
コンビニはどこですか？	konbini wa doko desu ka	Where is the convenience store ?
ガンダムはどこですか？	gandamu wa doko desu ka	Where is Gundam ?

That's it. You just gotta do it! You can drill phrases from whatever textbooks you are studying from, manga or even Learn Japanese Pod lesson notes which you can find on our podcast pages.

Tip # 5 - Know your Japanese adjectives

One really good way to start having conversations quickly in Japanese is learning adjectives. Why? Japanese usually omits the subject of a sentence. So although you could say 今日は暑い ですね Today is hot. You could just say, 暑い ですね it is hot. Or even just 暑い！ So you can simply say "hot" and it will make sense in Japanese. So by learning adjectives you are going to be able to say more with less.

This is because Japanese is what's called a high context language. If you compare it with English, a low context language, you rely on the words in the sentence to convey all the meaning.

However with Japanese, you have to take into account the situation in which the word is being spoken. So, if you are standing outside in the park, sweating and fanning yourself and you just say 暑い atsui - hot, the person listening will fill in the blanks and understand that you are saying that you are hot now.

That means, on the plus side, Japanese can be extremely minimal and efficient in conveying what you want to say. On the minus side, it can sometimes lead to infuriatingly vague and confusing conversations. So when in Japan, it's not what you say, it's where, when and by whom it is being said by.



Here are some examples:

暑い - atsui - hot

寒い - Samui - cold

冷たい - Tsumetai - cold, used for things like liquids or solids

高い - takai - high or expensive

安い - yasui - cheap

楽しい - tanoshii - fun

Also, adjectives conjugate. For example, if you wanted to say, it was fun, you say:

楽しかった - tanoshikatta - it was fun

Tip # 6 - Know your basic Japanese verb conjugation

Just like adjectives, you can use verbs to express more with less. Also, basic verb conjugation in Japanese is pretty simple. Just like adjectives, you can use single verbs on their own without a subject and sometime without an object. Check out this basic pattern:

行きます - ikimasu - to go (present)

行きません - ikimasen - not go (negative present)

行きました - ikimashita - went (past)

行きませんでした - ikimasen deshita - didn't go(negative past)

Depending on the situation you could simply say 行きませんでした which could mean "I didn't go" or if you raised your voice "Didn't you go?". It's all pretty useful stuff so make sure to learn some basic verbs.

Tip # 7 - Supercharge your Japanese with sentence enders

Although there are many sentence ending particles, you won't go far wrong if you start by learning "yo" and "ne".

"ne" means something like "isn't it" so for example:

楽しかったね - tanoshikatta ne - it was fun wasn't it

いいね - ii ne - That's good isn't it (This is also used on facebook for the "like" button)



"yo" emphasizes the point you want to make. So you could say:

楽しかったよ - tanoshikatta yo - It really was fun

いいよ - ii yo - That's fine. (That's totally OK)

Using sentence enders like these make you sound a lot more natural so learn them!

Tip # 8 - Listen to Japanese language learning podcasts

OK, shameless self promotion here but you can listen to my [Japanese language learning podcasts here](#).

You want to get as much listening practice as you can and these days there is a lot on line you can download and listen to. It's important to find something that you find interesting and can engage in to increase the chances you will keep listening to it. You don't have to limit yourself to podcasts. Check out Youtube videos, listen to the weather forecast on NHK news or perhaps watch anime online.

When I started studying Japanese a million years ago, I just bought a simple Japanese conversation textbook with a CD and listened to that religiously. It wasn't the best textbook out there but it really helped with my listening and prepared me well for studying Japanese conversation.

Whatever you listen to, the point is to just listen, even if you don't understand everything. The goal is to get used to the sounds, pace and intonation of Japanese. Trust me, it will really help with listening and building the base to develop your conversational skills. You can also listen to a repeat audio out loud which is called "shadowing". It's another great way to drill common sentence patterns as I talked about in point #4.

Tip # 9 - Learn Hiragana and Katakana and don't use Romaji

Just a quick tip here but try to learn Hiragana and Katakana as quickly as you can. Try to get away from using "romaji" to learn Japanese. This is because it's somewhat confusing to read Japanese in romaji script. Also, being able to read Hiragana and Katakana helps a little with pronunciation as it forces you to speak using the basic sounds of Japanese.

And don't be shy to start learning Kanji right from the start. But that's another article for later...



Tip # 10 - Get out there and practice your Japanese

I was having a conversation with a well traveled multi-lingual friend of mine who said something very interesting. He said “if you can engage with the culture, you won’t need any language classes”.

In other words, if you can take part in something you enjoy with other people who speak the language you want to learn, then you’ll learn a lot faster. Of course, taking lessons is essential. However, it can be all too easy to get stuck learning kanji lists and grammar points and not get out there and actually practice speaking with Japanese people.

If you can create the opportunity to interact with Japanese people in real life situations outside of the classroom, that’s when you start to really internalise the language and really start communicating.

My own Japanese speaking skills really improved when I studied in Japan and lived in a dormitory of Japanese students who didn’t speak English very well. I was forced to use Japanese on a daily basis which really helped me improve. I also studied Aikido for a while which also really boosted my speaking and listening skills.

Also, just hanging out with my Japanese buddies and drinking with them in Izakayas was a great experience and a really fun way to consolidate everything I had learned in the classroom.

Even if you don’t live in Japan, you can create opportunities to speak with Japanese people. For example, joining a club, taking Japanese lessons or even speaking to people online.



Hi, this is Alex from Learn Japanese Pod and thanks for downloading these show notes. I hope you found them useful. If you have any questions or comments about studying Japanese or my website, please let me know. I love helping anyone who wants to improve their Japanese or is just curious about traveling to Japan.

Feel free to send me an email at info@learnjapanesePod.com or leave a comment on any of the posts on the site at <http://learnjapanesePod.com>

Thanks !

Alex