

LESSON NOTES

Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide #1

Introduction to Perfect Japanese Pronunciation

CONTENTS

2 Grammar

#1

GRAMMAR

The Focus of the Lesson is Mastering the Building Blocks of Japanese Pronunciation

It's often said that Japanese pronunciation is one of the easiest aspects of the language. And guess what-it's true! But it still takes some practice, and we're here to help you with it. We'll introduce you to the ins and outs of Japanese pronunciation and show you how it differs from English pronunciation.

Sounds and Syllables

Let's first take a look at how Japanese sounds work. Compared with other languages, Japanese has a relatively small set of sounds, with only fourteen consonants (k, s, t, n, h, m, y, r, w, g, z, d, b, and p) and five vowels (a, e, i, o, and u). In Japanese, there are no such words as the English word "strength," which has clusters of three or more consonants. Japanese is made up of syllables, which are made up of a consonant and a vowel. The only exceptions are the vowels and the n sound, which stand alone.

Stress

Let's think about stress in English for a moment. Try saying the words "important" and "interesting" aloud. When you say these words aloud, you're putting emphasis, or stress, on a certain syllable. In "important," the stress is on the "port" syllable. In "interesting," the stress is on the "int" syllable. If you haven't studied phonetics before, it's probably something that just comes naturally that you've never noticed! Because correct English pronunciation emphasizes certain syllables, English is known as a stress language.

Japanese, on the other hand, doesn't have stress! It's a stress-free language! (Until you start learning kanji, perhaps...) In Japanese, each syllable is held the same length of time and given equal stress. Stressing only certain syllables will sound unnatural; so keep this in mind when pronouncing Japanese.

Let's take a look at a word in Japanese and compare how it is pronounced in both Japanese and English. Let's take the word teriyaki, the name of a cooking technique where meat is marinated.

English pronunciation: [ter-uh-YAH-kee] Note how the third syllable is stressed.

Japanese pronunciation: [teh-ree-yah-kee] In Japanese, each syllable receives the same amount of stress.