

The 80/20 JAPANESE Guide To Japanese Verb Tenses & Forms

Verb Structure & Types

Stem

Three types: "ru-verbs", "u-verbs", irregular verbs.

Ending

Changes according to verb tense/form and politeness.

+

Ru-Verbs (called "add-on verbs" in 80/20 Japanese)

Stem is always the same. Dictionary form (informal present/future tense) is always "stem + ru", eg. eat = **taberu**.

U-verbs ("vowel-changing verbs")

Last sound in stem changes to fit verb ending.

This sound is taken from same line in syllabary (hiragana chart) for all tenses for a given verb. See examples below.

Notation: stem(X) = stem with X vowel sound variant.

Vowel (X)	Example tense/form with stem(X)	Examples		
		drink	write	buy
a	Negative informal = stem(a) + nai	nom <u>a</u> nai	kak <u>a</u> nai	kaw <u>a</u> nai*
i	Polite present/future = stem(i) + masu	nom <u>i</u> masu	kak <u>i</u> masu	kai <u>i</u> masu
u	Dictionary = stem(u)	nom <u>u</u>	kak <u>u</u>	kaw <u>u</u>
e	Polite potential = stem(e) + masu	nom <u>e</u> masu	kak <u>e</u> masu	kaw <u>e</u> masu
o	Let's... = stem(o)	nom <u>o</u>	kak <u>o</u>	kaw <u>o</u>
- (none)	Informal past = stem(-) + [various]	nonda	kaita	katta

*If last sound in stem is from a-line (a,i,u,e,o), stem(a) variant uses "wa".

Irregular verbs

Don't fit either of above types. Only three verbs in this category: suru/shimasu (do), kuru/kimasu (come), iku/ikimasu (go).

Verb Tense/Form Selection and Usage

Japanese verbs are conjugated based on two things - function (tense/form) and politeness (polite or informal).

Choosing the appropriate level of politeness

Polite	Informal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People older or more senior (eg. boss, even if a younger age) Unfamiliar people Clients, customers etc. <p>If in doubt, be polite!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiar people, such as family and close friends (incl. close older people) People younger or more junior (eg. subordinates, lower-rank colleagues) Children (often even if unfamiliar)

Choosing the appropriate verb tense/form

Tense/form	When to use it
Present/Future	Actions that start in the future; Recurring/habitual actions
Past	Actions that have completed (incl. recurring/habitual actions that have ceased)
Negative forms	Same as for equivalent positive form, but with negative meaning, ie. "will not __", "did not __", etc.
Let's...	To say, "Let's do...". Add "ka" for question: "Shall we...?".
Potential	To say someone can do/is capable of doing something.
I want to...	To say, "I want to...". Not used for, "I want [something]". Change "tai" to "takunai" to make negative (don't want).
Te-Form	Many uses, including (but not limited to): ~te + iru/imasu: "Is doing". Actions currently in progress. ~te + ita/imashita: "Was doing". Actions that were in progress at a specific time in the past (eg. At 2pm, I was ...) ~te + kudasai: "Please ..." (eg. Please eat = tabete kudasai) ~te + [other verb/phrase]: Action followed by another action. Can be stacked for multiple subsequent actions.

Polite Verb Tenses & Forms

	Present/future	Past	Negative present/future	Negative past	"Let's..." form	"I want to..."	Potential ("can do")
ru-verbs	stem + masu	stem + mashita	stem + masen	stem + masen deshita	stem + mashō	stem + tai desu	stem + raremasu
u-verbs	stem(i) + masu	stem(i) + mashita	stem(i) + masen	stem(i) + masen deshita	stem(i) + mashō	stem(i) + tai desu	stem(e) + masu
shimasu	shimasu	shimashita	shimasen	shimasen deshita	shimashō	shitai desu	dekimasu
kimasu	kimasu	kimashita	kimasen	kimasen deshita	kimashō	kitai desu	koraremasu
ikimasu	ikimasu	ikimashita	ikimasen	ikimasen deshita	ikimashō	ikitai desu	ikemasu

Informal Verb Tenses & Forms

Note: U-verb conjugations for past tense and ㇿ-form vary according to last sound. Grouped here by last sound in dict. form.

	Present/future	Past	Negative present/future	Negative past	"Let's..."	"I want to..."	Potential ("can do")	Te-Form
ru-verbs	stem + ru	stem + ta	stem + nai	stem + nakatta	stem + yō	stem + tai	stem + rareru	stem + te
u-verbs	stem(u)	stem(-) + tta	stem(a) + nai	stem(a) + nakatta	stem(ō)	stem(i) + tai	stem(e) + ru	stem(-) + tte
u, tsu, ru		stem(-) + nda						stem(-) + nde
bu, mu, nu		stem(-) + ita						stem(-) + ite
ku		stem(-) + ida						stem(-) + ide
gu		stem(-) + shita						stem(-) + shite
su								
shimasu	suru	shita	shinai	shinakatta	shiyō	shitai	dekiru	shite
kimasu	kuru	kita	konai	konakatta	koyō	kitai	korareru	kite
ikimasu	iku	itta	ikanai	ikanakatta	ikō	ikitai	ikeru	itte

Te-Form

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Polite Forms

	Present/future [does/will do]		Past [did]		Negative present/future (past) [does not/will not do (did not do)]		"Let's..." [add 'ka' = "Shall we...?"]		"I want to..." [neg = takunai desu]		Potential (can do) [neg = ~masen]	
	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending
Ru-verbs	stem + masu		stem + mashita		stem + masen (deshita)		stem + mashō		stem + tai desu		stem + raremasu	
eat	tabe	masu	tabe	mashita	tabe	masen (deshita)	tabe	mashō	tabe	tai desu	tabe	raremasu
watch	mi	masu	mi	mashita	mi	masen (deshita)	mi	mashō	mi	tai desu	mi	raremasu
sleep	ne	masu	ne	mashita	ne	masen (deshita)	ne	mashō	ne	tai desu	ne	raremasu
U-verbs (by dict form end)	stem(i) + masu		stem(i) + mashita		stem(i) + masen (deshita)		stem(i) + mashō		stem(i) + tai desu		stem(e) + masu	
u buy	ka	i masu	ka	i mashita	ka	i masen (deshita)	ka	i mashō	ka	i tai desu	ka	e masu
tsu stand	ta	chi masu	ta	chi mashita	ta	chi masen (deshita)	ta	chi mashō	ta	chi tai desu	ta	te masu
ru return home	kae	ri masu	kae	ri mashita	kae	ri masen (deshita)	kae	ri mashō	kae	ri tai desu	kae	re masu
bu play	aso	bi masu	aso	bi mashita	aso	bi masen (deshita)	aso	bi mashō	aso	bi tai desu	aso	be masu
mu drink	no	mi masu	no	mi mashita	no	mi masen (deshita)	no	mi mashō	no	mi tai desu	no	me masu
nu die	shi	ni masu	shi	ni mashita	shi	ni masen (deshita)	shi	ni mashō	shi	ni tai desu	shi	ne masu
ku listen	ki	ki masu	ki	ki mashita	ki	ki masen (deshita)	ki	ki mashō	ki	ki tai desu	ki	ke masu
gu swim	oyo	gi masu	oyo	gi mashita	oyo	gi masen (deshita)	oyo	gi mashō	oyo	gi tai desu	oyo	ge masu
su speak	hana	shi masu	hana	shi mashita	hana	shi masen (deshita)	hana	shi mashō	hana	shi tai desu	hana	se masu
Irregular verbs												
do (suru)	shimasu		shimashita		shimasen (deshita)		shimashō		shitai desu		dekimasu	
come (kuru)	kimasu		kimashita		kimasen (deshita)		kimashō		kitai desu		koraremasu	
go (iku)	ikimasu		ikimashita		ikimasen (deshita)		ikimashō		ikitai desu		ikemasu	

Informal Forms

	Present/future [does/will do]		Past [did]		Neg present/future [does not do/will not do]		Negative past [did not do]		"Let's..." [add 'ka' = 'Shall we...?']		"I want to..." [neg = ~takunai]		Potential (can do) [neg = ~ru → ~nai]	
	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending	Stem	Ending
Ru-verbs	stem + ru		stem + ta		stem + nai		stem + nakatta		stem + yō		stem + tai		stem + rareru	
eat	tabe	ru	tabe	ta	tabe	nai	tabe	nakatta	tabe	yō	tabe	tai	tabe	rareru
watch	mi	ru	mi	ta	mi	nai	mi	nakatta	mi	yō	mi	tai	mi	rareru
sleep	ne	ru	ne	ta	ne	nai	ne	nakatta	ne	yō	ne	tai	ne	rareru
U-verbs (by dict form end)	stem(u)		stem(-) + [var]		stem(a) + nai		stem(a) + nakatta		stem(ō)		stem(i) + tai		stem(e) + ru	
u buy	ka	u	ka	tta	ka	wa nai	ka	wa nakatta	ka	ō	ka	i tai	ka	e ru
tsu stand	ta	tsu	ta	tta	ta	ta nai	ta	ta nakatta	ta	tō	ta	chi tai	ta	te ru
ru return home	kae	ru	kae	tta	kae	ra nai	kae	ra nakatta	kae	rō	kae	ri tai	kae	re ru
bu play	aso	bu	aso	nda	aso	ba nai	aso	ba nakatta	aso	bō	aso	bi tai	aso	be ru
mu drink	no	mu	no	nda	no	ma nai	no	ma nakatta	no	mō	no	mi tai	no	me ru
nu die	shi	nu	shi	nda	shi	na nai	shi	na nakatta	shi	nō	shi	ni tai	shi	ne ru
ku listen	ki	ku	ki	ita	ki	ka nai	ki	ka nakatta	ki	kō	ki	ki tai	ki	ke ru
gu swim	oyo	gu	oyo	ida	oyo	ga nai	oyo	ga nakatta	oyo	gō	oyo	gi tai	oyo	ge ru
su speak	hana	su	hana	shita	hana	sa nai	hana	sa nakatta	hana	sō	hana	shi tai	hana	se ru
Irregular verbs														
do (suru)	suru		shita		shinai		shinakatta		shiyō		shitai		dekiru	
come (kuru)	kuru		kita		konai		konakatta		koyō		kitai		korareru	
go (iku)	iku		itta		ikanai		ikanakatta		ikō		ikitai		ikeru	

Te-Form Formation & Example Use-Cases

		Te-Form		Polite "Is doing"		"Please..."	
U-verbs (by dictionary form ending)							
u	buy	ka	tte	katte imasu	katte kudasai		
tsu	stand	ta	tte	tatte imasu	tatte kudasai		
ru	return home	kae	tte	kaette imasu	kaette kudasai		
bu	play	aso	nde	asonde imasu	asonde kudasai		
mu	drink	no	nde	nonde imasu	nonde kudasai		
nu	die	shi	nde	shinde imasu	shinde kudasai		
ku	listen	ki	ite	kiite imasu	kiite kudasai		
gu	swim	oyo	ide	oyoide imasu	oyoide kudasai		
su	speak	hana	shite	hanashite imasu	hanashite kudasai		

		Te-Form		Polite "Is doing"		"Please..."	
Ru-verbs							
eat		tabe	te	tabete imasu	tabete kudasai		
watch		mi	te	mite imasu	mite kudasai		
sleep		ne	te	nete imasu	nete kudasai		
Irregular verbs							
do (suru)		shite		shite imasu	shite kudasai		
come (kuru)		kite		kite imasu	kite kudasai		
go (iku)		itte		itte imasu	itte kudasai		