



# Japanese

Learning Japanese is more than just acquiring a new set of linguistic skills – it's an immersive experience into a culture that is rich in tradition, modernity, and expression. Japan's language, 日本語 (Nihongo), serves as a gateway to understanding the nation's unique history, artistic achievements, and social norms. This guide will provide you with insights into Japanese culture and language, as well as some foundational phrases to start your learning journey.

## The Japanese Language (日本語: Nihongo)

Japanese is an East Asian language spoken by about 128 million people, primarily in Japan. It is a part of the Japonic language family, which is somewhat of a linguistic enigma, with debated links to other language families such as Turkish. Japanese uses three main scripts: Kanji (漢字), which are characters of Chinese origin, and two syllabaries—Hiragana (ひらがな) and Katakana (カタカナ).

### Writing System

- **Kanji (漢字):** A system of Japanese writing using Chinese characters. There are thousands of Kanji, with education in Japan covering around 2,000 essential characters. Each Kanji can have multiple readings, or ways of being pronounced, depending on context.
- **Hiragana (ひらがな):** A phonetic script used for native Japanese words, grammatical elements, and for words that do not have a Kanji representation.
- **Katakana (カタカナ):** A phonetic script similar to Hiragana, but used primarily for foreign loanwords, scientific names, and to depict emphasis or onomatopoeia.
- **Romaji:** The Latin alphabet representation of Japanese sounds. It is mostly used for the benefit of non-Japanese speakers and for the input of Japanese characters on keyboards.

Japanese pronunciation is relatively straightforward as it has a limited number of vowel and consonant sounds. The language is syllabic, meaning that almost every character corresponds to one syllable.

The grammar, however, can be challenging. Japanese is an SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) language. Unlike English, the verb always comes at the end of the sentence. Additionally, Japanese relies heavily on context, which means subjects and even objects can be omitted if they are understood from context.

## Japanese Culture (日本文化: Nippon Bunka)

Japanese culture is marked by a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity. Shintoism and Buddhism are the two major religions that influence cultural practices, festivals, and daily life in Japan. Customs such as the tea ceremony, martial arts, and flower arranging (ikebana) exemplify the detailed attention and mindfulness that are so prized in Japanese culture.

In the bustling cities, cutting-edge technology and fashion live alongside centuries-old temples and practices. Mean-

while, Japan's dedication to etiquette, exemplified in the bow (お辞儀: ojigi) and polite language (敬語: keigo), underscores the society's valuing of respect and harmony.

## Learning Japanese Phrases

As you embark on your journey to learn Japanese, becoming familiar with common phrases will help you to engage with the culture and its people. Here are some basic expressions to get you started:

- こんにちは (Konnichiwa) - Hello/Good Afternoon
- おはようございます (Ohayou gozaimasu) - Good Morning
- こんばんは (Konbanwa) - Good Evening
- さようなら (Sayounara) - Goodbye
- ありがとうございます (Arigatou gozaimasu) - Thank you
- すみません (Sumimasen) - Excuse me/I'm sorry
- お願いします (Onegaishimasu) - Please
- はい (Hai) - Yes
- いいえ (Iie) - No
- 一 (Ichi) - One
- 二 (Ni) - Two
- 三 (San) - Three
- 四 (Shi/Yon) - Four
- 五 (Go) - Five
- 六 (Roku) - Six
- 七 (Shichi/Nana) - Seven
- 八 (Hachi) - Eight
- 九 (Kyu/Ku) - Nine
- 十 (Juu) - Ten

## Career Prospects with Japanese Language Skills

Learning Japanese can significantly enhance career opportunities in a number of fields. Japan is the third-largest economy in the world, and as such, it maintains an important place on the global stage. Here are some sectors where Japanese language skills are particularly valuable:

- **Business and Finance:** Global corporations often seek professionals who can negotiate and communicate fluently in Japanese. The ability to understand the social and cultural contexts of business practices is a considerable asset.
- **Diplomacy and Government:** Careers in international relations can be bolstered by proficiency in Japanese, facilitating more effective engagement with Japanese institutions and partners.
- **Translation and Interpretation:** A high demand exists for skilled translators and interpreters, both for business purposes and for translating cultural content like literature, games, and media.
- **Teaching:** There are opportunities to teach English in Japan through programs like JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme), as well as a demand for Japanese teachers abroad.
- **Technology and Engineering:** Japan is a leader in many areas of technology. Proficiency in Japanese combined with expertise in a technical field can open many doors.
- **Tourism and Hospitality:** With Japan being a top travel destination, Japanese language skills are highly sought after in the tourism industry.
- **Academia and Research:** For students and scholars of humanities and sciences, knowledge of Japanese can be essential for accessing a wealth of research materials that are not available in English.

## Where Can I Start at LaGuardia Community College

At LaGuardia Community College, the Modern Languages and Literatures Program offers dynamic courses in diverse languages, fostering global understanding and communication skills. Our dedicated faculty prepare students for exciting, multilingual futures, embracing cultural richness and enhancing career opportunities in our interconnected world. For more information about our world language courses and schedule, visit <https://lagccml.github.io>.