



# Learn Japanese: Benkyō

iOS App submission update  
**Major update: Version 2.0**

<b>App Store link</b>	<a href="https://apps.apple.com/app/apple-store/id1541592138">https://apps.apple.com/app/apple-store/id1541592138</a> (Ready for Sale)
<b>Release date</b>	December 30, 2020 (worldwide - was available on preorder since Dec. 4)
<b>Categories</b>	Education (primary) & Reference (secondary)
<b>Developer</b>	Romain Pellen (individual - DL6QZH2NDP)
<b>Marketing URL</b>	<a href="https://twitter.com/benkyoapp">https://twitter.com/benkyoapp</a>

Version 2.0 TestFlight link:

<https://testflight.apple.com/join/YIkxB5rl>

(Please note this beta is not a final representation of version 2.0 release)

This app was originally submitted to <https://developer.apple.com/contact/app-store/promote/> on Dec. 10, 2020, while it was on Pre-Order state.

Since the original submission, I (the developer) was invited to online workshops by the App Store team France (from Feb. 2021 onwards).

This new submission intends to tell you more about the version 2.0 of the App while reminding its main characteristics.

# The app in a nutshell

Benkyō is a subscription based freemium app (with lifetime purchase option).

## Value proposition

**Benkyō helps**  
**people willing to learn the Japanese language**  
**study elements of the language that needs to be memorised**  
**more efficiently and more conveniently while keeping them motivated.**

## Main benefits

Learning the Japanese language is a long journey. There is a lot of informations to memorise, Benkyō helps with the following items:

Language item	Description	Available for free	Added with PRO subscription
Kana	Japanese alphabets (2 sets)	214	N/A
Kanji	Japanese characters (called Kanji) that are mixed with the alphabet in the writing system	2233	10808
Vocabulary	Japanese words, organized in decks in the app	2313	8347

The time we spend studying these usually takes the form of long study sessions, and the order of item reviews would be up to the learner (in other words: organized with a very basic learning optimization strategy).

On the opposite, Benkyō offers a learning experience that provides 4 main benefits:

**1) Split study time into flexible length sessions, short and long.**

Typically combining our time in the public transports or other short available periods of time we have with longer dedicated study sessions. That way we can study more in the long run, and drastically reduce study fatigue. This is made possible by the convenience of a mobile application.

**2) Organize review items (called flashcards) efficiently.**

The way our memory works is that when learning a new piece of information, the said information will be forgotten after a short period of time (a few days). However if we make the effort to recall this information, not only do we reset the « forgetting timer », but the period before we forget it increases exponentially. Repeating the recalls at the right times therefore ensures an optimal usage of our study time. This is possible with Spaced Repetition System (SRS). Softwares like Benkyō makes it easy to organize every separate item review timing.

**3) Make the review fun and interactive.**

The study session in the app take the form of quizzes, they offer a high level of options and

customization. One of these customization (called a « killer feature » by many users) is that the app can let the user draw the answer (for kana and kanji) and automatically detect if the drawing is correct. This offers a learning experience that is more effective than just multiple choice question (tho MCQ is also available for answer input, as well as keyboard, and input can be automatically decided based on past performance for the specific question).

4) **Keep the learner motivated by showing him his progress via statistics and various metrics.**

Including over-time charts, study day streaks, mastery state, history, etc. Again, this is only possible in an application, Benkyō uses CoreData framework to save locally any study activity and compute statistics.

On top of that, Benkyō is also a learning companion as it allows to browse, search and filter Japanese language content library (kanji, vocabulary, hiragana & katakana), manage lists, practice handdrawing Japanese characters, listen pronunciations, see review plan on the home screen with a Widget, etc.

→ Find screenshots in Appendix 1 to get a quick sense of the app and its features

# What is new in version 2.0?

The main benefits this version brings is better onboarding experience, better feature presentation and clarity, and new features that can significantly help learners, including the new focussed study mode.

This update incorporates feedback from real users, inputs from the App Store team France, and advices from Apple designers and engineers offered during WWDC21 labs.

- Radically different home design
- Features and concepts are introduced to the user more progressively
- Better library search feature: much faster, with global scope & history
- New features
  - Focussed study mode
  - New statistics
  - Study activity in a calendar view
- Various screen redesigns
- Lots of optimisations, UI improvements, bug fixes, small features and data adjustments

All new screens are built using SwiftUI, the update therefore requires iOS 14+ (previously 11.2+).

Feedback from beta-testers of version 2.0 so far is excellent, the new study focus mode is on the most praised evolution.

Furthermore, the current beta version will evolve before the update release with other screen redesigns in SwiftUI and complete localisation in French.

→ The provisional complete update notes are available in appendix 2

# How does Benkyō stand out?

## A design philosophy inspired by Apple

Benkyō is designed with user experience in mind. iPhone / iPad users expect high quality from their apps and attention to details.

UI and UX have been worked on to go the extra mile. Small things like the ability to pass a question during a quiz, or the option to consult the entry details after it was wrongly answered are examples of details that are often overlooked in the competition, yet it provides a big quality of life improvement for users and allows them to learn better.

Users are given great flexibility and powerful options while keeping the UI as simple and easy to understand as possible. That is a constant but exciting challenge for me.

Benkyō also features cool functionalities like automatic recognition for handwriting during a quiz, that would automatically classify the answer as correct when appropriate (this is editable on the fly by the user), or reminders (push notifications) at the time of the user's choosing.

## Users love it

With a worldwide rating of **4.8 stars** (1455 ratings - 192 reviews), Benkyō has proven it brings value to its users.

Many user reviews talk of it as the best app of its kind. Here are some user reviews:

Great Japanese flashcard app ★★★★☆

[Répondre](#)

par Kinnikuman Kuma – 22 févr. 2022

This is the most helpful Japanese flashcard app I've found. It allows creating multiple custom lists, so you can focus on particular new vocabulary as you learn, then keep a second list of everything you've learned to date to allow you to stay on top of everything. The algorithm will quiz more frequently on mistakes and less on items that have been correct consistently, but will still ask about everything to some degree to ensure older vocabulary isn't forgotten. While the app includes kun-yomi and on-yomi readings for kanji, it would be extremely helpful if these were treated and tested separately. For example, have the quiz ask for a specific reading rather than allowing either in order to ensure users are learning both.

Version 1.1.1 | États-Unis | [Signaler un problème](#)

you need this app ★★★★☆

[Répondre](#)

par churchj6 – 5 févr. 2022

If you are learning Japanese this app is a treasure there are comfortable interface and lots of kanji are easy to remember bc of nice work from app's creators

Version 1.1.1 | Russie | [Signaler un problème](#)

best kanji and kana app!! ★★★★☆

[Répondre](#)

par julsherei – 29 janv. 2022

tried there kana app first and it really helped me to memorize the characters and its also enjoying since i get a sense of achievement everytime i master a character, now i tried this and i think its really helping me to memorize many kanji characters you dont even hav to pay too learn that much its just wonderful i liked it

Version 1.1.1 | Philippines | [Signaler un problème](#)

Dude ★★★★☆

par Neji Hanna – 18 mars 2021

◀ Répondre

This app just like all the other ones are PERFECTION! When I first got one of apps I think it was the kanji one, I thought it wasn't gonna be as good...it's tremendously awesome in every way. It's like I'm in a class and a teacher is teaching right in front of me, thanks for this app it really really helps. Why don't more people have this downloaded?

Version 1.0.10 | États-Unis | [Signaler un problème](#)

Best app to study japanese ★★★★☆

par Lucileaf1998 – 8 nov. 2021

◀ Répondre

Big fan of books and old school learning, but this is by far the best app to study japanese. I love that we can practice our kanji writing ! A million thanks, I use Benkyo every day and didn't even hesitate to buy the Lifetime version.

Version 1.1.1 | France | [Signaler un problème](#)

Very good for learning and practicing kana ★★★★☆

par That computer guy 1212 – 31 déc. 2021

◀ Répondre

Very good for learning and practicing kana, better than Duolingo for that.

Version 1.1.1 | États-Unis | [Signaler un problème](#)

The Best App on the App Store for Japanese. Period. ★★★★☆

par Clos3y – 21 févr. 2021

◀ Répondre

I don't think I've ever used such a friendly, usable, thoughtful and well designed app ever in my life. It was an immediate purchase for the lifetime subscription. It's brilliant. This absolutely dunks on Duolingo and the likes, and it's made by one guy! Big app studios have a lot to learn from Romain. The only change I'd make is the ability to remove items from practice history. For instance, if I practiced a JLPT 2 kanji too soon and didn't want it to appear in statistics. Please keep up the good work!

Version 1.0.9 | Royaume-Uni | [Signaler un problème](#)

Extremely useful and practical ★★★★☆

par Botlike – 27 janv. 2022

◀ Répondre

The app empowers you to help with the studies very well. I can practice every direction I want, the words and kana I want, as frequently as I want. It has reasonably well working handwriting recognition which is a killer feature by itself. I wish more people would know about it!

Version 1.1.1 | Russie | [Signaler un problème](#)

Great for learning kanji efficiently ★★★★☆

par annika\_DE – 10 janv. 2021

◀ Répondre

This is an incredibly useful app. All kanji in one place, flexible options for learning exactly what I choose, and just the right amount of progress tracking for keeping the motivation up. The developer did a great job, the app is definitely worth the money. Bye bye paper flashcards!

Version 1.0.4 | Allemagne | [Signaler un problème](#)

## Benkyō is being featured by the App Store team in France

After the first submission on <https://developer.apple.com/contact/app-store/promote/>, Benkyō was featured on the App tab of the App Store in France. I noted the following features:

**"This week's favorites"** (March & April 2021 - France)

**"Widgets: improve your language level"** (April 2021 - France)

**"Find a new passion or profession"** (May 2021, June 2021, September 2021 & February 2022 - France)

**"Add Widgets to your home screen"** (February 2022 - France)

I am very grateful and humbled for this features. 🙏

# Marketing / business plan

Sales during the first year on the App Store proves product-market-fit. I will therefore focus on growing the app and optimizing different steps of the sale funnel.

## Product

The main conversion factor is providing value to the user, respond to their needs and solve their problem. Therefore evolving the app is a priority.

The app will be continuously improve, there is plenty of user requests for improvements. The most requested not in V2.0 is device syncing, it will be implemented in priority after V2.0 release. Future features also include improvements to the quiz experience, lists management, and library exploring.

Transition to SwiftUI will also go forward and therefore continue to improve the Benkyō experience on macOS.

## App Store product page optimization

App Store's A/B testing new feature for product pages will be used largely to find better screenshots / app previews and icons. A first test already highlighted an improvement (around 5%) for removing the existing app preview video.

I'm currently looking for a designer to make an icon with a style close to what I need or one that would propose their original vision.

## Apple Search Ads

I have been running Apple Search Ads discovery campaigns. I will continue identifying keywords that perform and then invest with it in exact match campaigns.

I also intend to take advantage of custom product pages integration with Apple Search Ads to identify potential interesting positioning.

## In-App Events

I talked about the possibility to incorporate App Store's In-App Events into Benkyō during a WWDC21 lab and the engineer was enthusiast about it. Therefore, I intend to include Game Center leaderboards in the app that would allow to create community events where everyone make a study push together. An example of event name would be « Summer Kanji Drill ».

The objective is to increase engagement and App Store visibility.

## Promotion

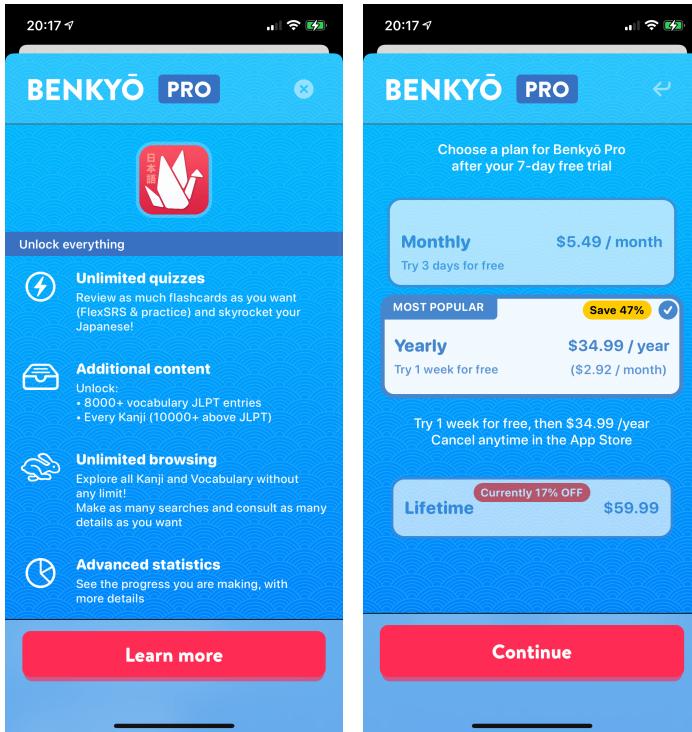
I will provide values in online related communities and refer the app. This has proven efficient in the past.

# Paywall

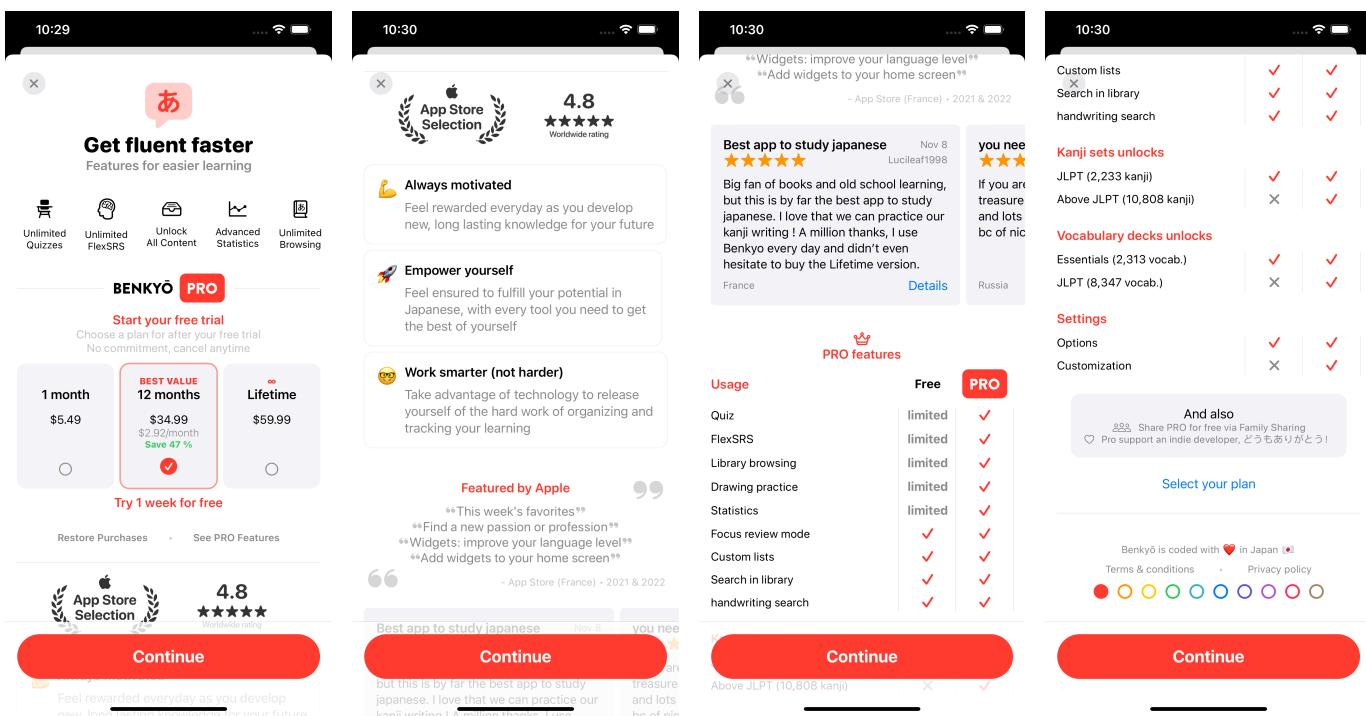
In order of optimizing steps of the sale funnel, a new paywall is being prepared, it will be optimized continually. The new version incorporates industry's best practices, with social proof, better presentation of the benefits, and reduction of the friction for purchasing.

Here is a comparaison of the current and future (non final, work in progress) paywalls:

## Current version



## Future version - provisional



# Developer's story

## Origins of the app idea

As a teenager, my friends and I were very into manga. We used to lend our book collection to each other and practice drawing its artistic style. That got me very attracted to Japan and its culture. And few years later, I lived there. For the last year before graduation from my engineering school in France, I was an exchange student at Keio University in Tokyo.

At that time, I got my first iPhone and could not help but imagine what apps I could create as a developer. Keio did not offer mobile programming class at that time (2010-2011) so I learned with Stanford's iTunes U course CS193P and developed a prototype. That's how my research and development project at Keio turned into the development of the very first version of Benkyō. I was eager to achieve an app that stands out, adapted for mobile and that could really help Japanese language learners with polished features and content.

In 2019, I released Kana to help beginners learn the Japanese alphabet. I then released Sensei, a Japanese grammar lessons app. I received so much positive feedback from users around the world that I decided keep going and work hard to craft an app that goes way beyond Kana, this app is Benkyō. In 2021, Benkyō proved to be useful for its audience by getting significant sales and subscribers. I'll give my best to make sure this story is just getting started.

## About the development

I have professional experience as an iOS developer: I worked in France and Singapore for big apps editors (Edjing: <https://apps.apple.com/app/id493226494> • Bitsmedia: <https://apps.apple.com/app/id388389451>)  
• SDK publishers (Temasys Pte. Ltd's « Skylink » iOS SDK) • or small teams (Break: the social blackout, App ID: 895041984 - developer removed on March 11, 2018)

However I realized that my dream was to provide my own product vision, confront it to market and see real customers response. I am humbled to see my dream take concrete form.

I left my job and went to Japan for a year in early 2020 under a working-holiday visa, and spent most of my time focusing on Benkyō. Now back in France, I continue to make Benkyō my priority.

I work on every aspect myself, including design, marketing, strategy, art, copywriting, etc... I love the challenge for the diversity of things to learn and do.



Me, posing in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, Japan

# Appendix 1

## A picture is worth a thousand words

Here are a few screenshots with short descriptions to get a quick sense of the app's content

The grid displays 16 screenshots of the app's features:

- Row 1:** Statistics & progress (New glance view), Statistics (Evolution of mastery), Library tab (Explore Japanese), Global search.
- Row 2:** Statistics: New glance view, Statistics: Evolution of the user's mastery of items he reviewed, New library tab, New global search.
- Row 3:** Kanji list view (JLPT 5), Kanji filters, Hiragana details, Drawing practice.

**Statistics & progress (Left):** Shows study streaks, quizzes taken, training time, and a global score of 85%.

**Statistics (Middle Left):** Shows total score (74%), Kanji mastery (44/62), Kana mastery (144/186), and vocabulary (55 quizzes). Includes a chart of flashcard mastery evolution from Nov 10 to Nov 20.

**Library (Middle Right):** Shows the 'Explore Japanese' section with tabs for Kanji, Vocabulary, and Kana. A search bar at the top finds results for 'cat, neko'.

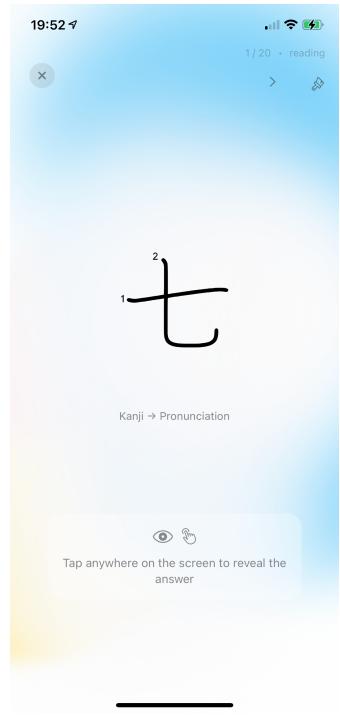
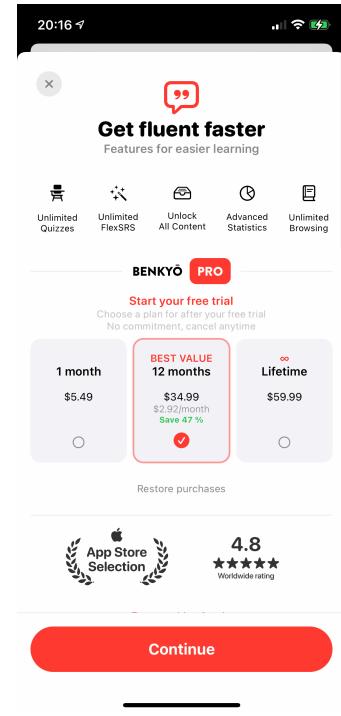
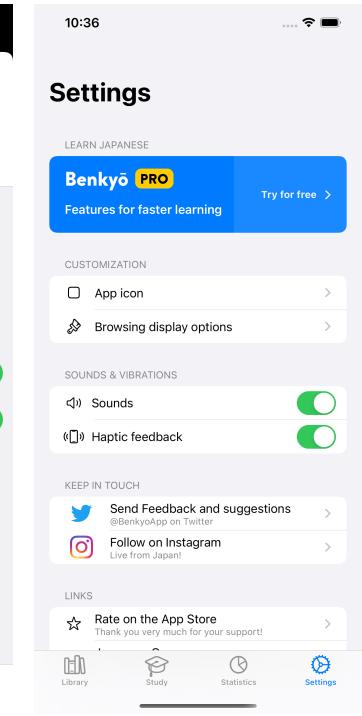
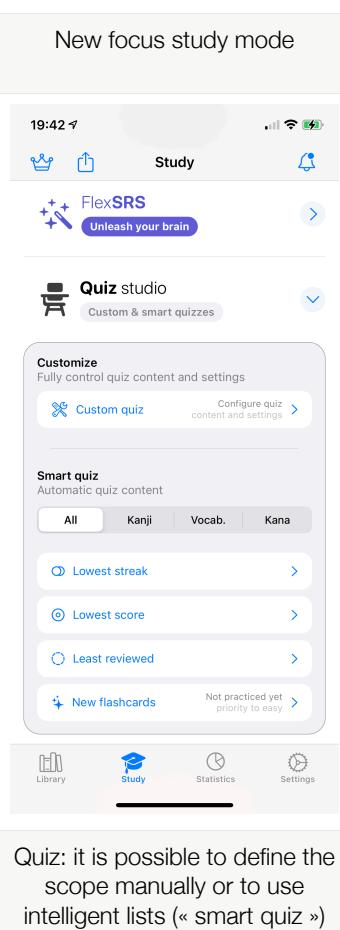
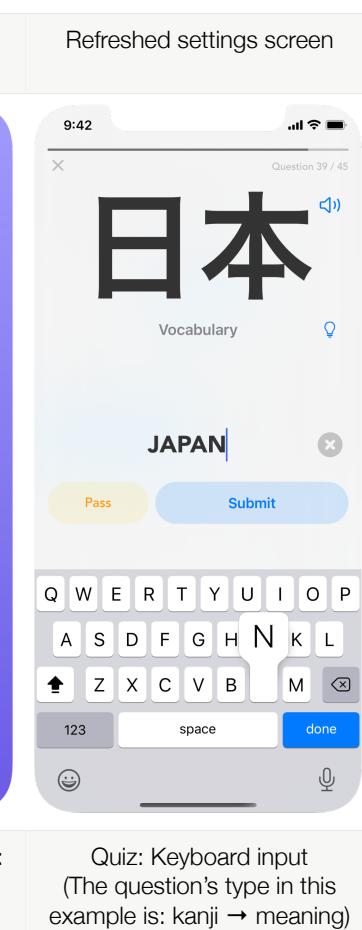
**Global search (Right):** Shows a search interface with a keyboard and search results for 'cat, neko'.

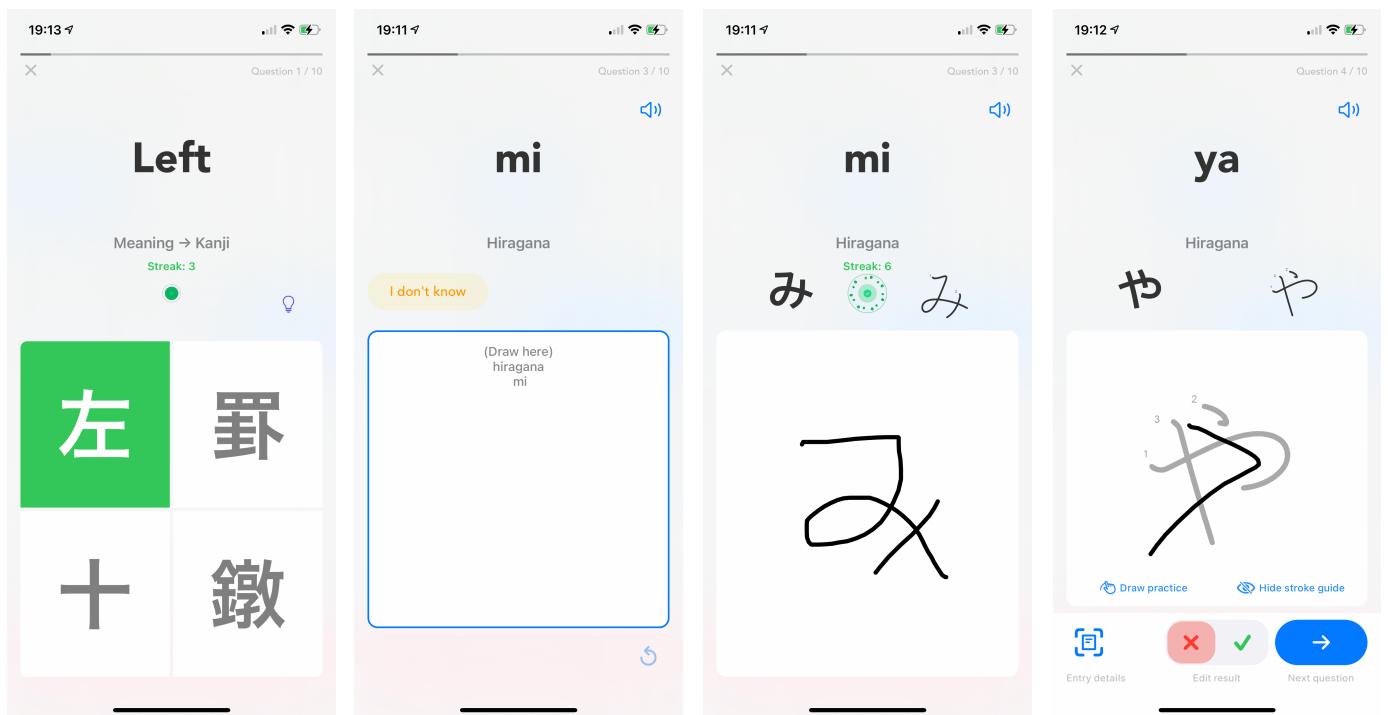
**Kanji list view (Bottom Left):** Shows a list of kanji characters for JLPT 5, including '二', '三', '四', etc., and their stroke order.

**Kanji filters (Bottom Middle Left):** Shows filters for JLPT levels (5-0), grade (1-10), frequency score (10-0), categories (Nature, Time), and conditions to match.

**Hiragana details (Bottom Middle Right):** Shows details for the Hiragana character 'い', including stroke order, practice stats (92% correct), and a drawing practice section.

**Drawing practice (Bottom Right):** Shows a drawing practice screen for the kanji '火' (fire), with stroke order numbered 1 through 4.

			
<p>New focus study mode</p>  <p>Quiz: it is possible to define the scope manually or to use intelligent lists (« smart quiz »)</p>	<p>New paywall (not final)</p>  <p>Quiz: various options are available to customise the quiz experience</p>	<p>New study activity calendar view</p>  <p>SRS Quiz preparation screen: questions are sorted by urgency of review by an AI</p>	<p>Refreshed settings screen</p>  <p>Quiz: Keyboard input (The question's type in this example is: kanji → meaning)</p>



Quiz: multiple choice answer input  
(The question's type in this example is: meaning → kanji)

Quiz: Drawing question (pronunciation → hiragana)

Quiz: Drawing question.  
The correct answer is automatically detected (there is an option to disable auto-recognition)

Quiz: Drawing question wrongly answered:  
User can compare their answer with the correct one, practice drawing it or see details of the entry (hiragana in this example)

## Appendix 2

### Provisional complete update release notes

Enjoy exploring Japanese with more convenience, and study even better with the new features of this major app version.

Thank you to all users who sent me feedback and suggestions that helped build this update. More suggestions will be incorporated in the future.

- NEW search system: search in the whole library (or apply filters), get fast results, and quickly access search history. Available in the new library tab
- NEW Focus study mode: Practice recalling kana, kanji or vocabulary without the quiz pressure, tap to Toggle the answer's visibility (ie. The flashcard's back). There is no score or timer, so you can focus on memorising. UI options are available for this mode, including an animated blur background to help you get in the zone. Access this mode from a list or after a quiz to review wrong answers.
- NEW UI/UX and new content for the home tabs

#### → LIBRARY

- The “Explore” tab is now named “Library” to better reflect its purpose. It presents itself in a whole new fashion and offers quick access to Kanji, Vocabulary and Kana browsing, as well as your custom lists and your browse history.
- Use the draw search to experiment handwriting and let the app find Kanji or Kana that matches your drawing
- New search bar (details above)

#### → QUIZ

- The “Study” tab has also been redesigned. It now focusses only on quiz, with quick access to FlexSRS, Smart and custom quizzes.
- New FlexSRS introduction view for better familiarisation with this special kind of quiz that can boost your learning!

#### → Statistics

- Track your progress on this new dedicated tab. Get global metrics at a glance, or dive into detailed stats.
- New study streak card with best and current streaks, keep on studying and get better everyday!
- New pie chart visualisation of flashcard mastery

#### → Settings

- Settings now get their own tab along with added options and a fresh look

- And also...
  - New onboarding flow to better welcome you to Benkyō
  - Quiz scope performance optimised
  - Quiz options screen now displays available flashcard kinds for each type of entry according to the quiz scope
  - You can now swipe between entries in your lists
  - UI improvements in multiple screens
  - Fixed a crash occurring on the quiz scope screen when a lot of lists containing a lot of entries in custom quiz were selected
  - Updated technical grounds
  - Code rationalisation for faster future updates and better maintenance
  - Multiple optimisations, fixes and improvements

This update enhances your experience by taking advantage of the latest iOS technologies like SwiftUI, therefore iOS 14 or more recent is required.

As always, let me know if you like the update and your suggestions (settings → keep in touch)Please leave an App Store review to help more Japanese learners know what you think of Benkyō!