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## Is it easy to learn Japanese?

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Riley Dee Jones, Teacher at Mutsu City Board of Education

Answered Oct 2, 2017

Originally Answered: Is it easy to learn Nihongo?

In my opinion, as an native English speaker who was born in America, learning Japanese was initially very difficult. Character recognizing is somewhat simple for Hiragana and Katakana (two of the three character sets used in Japanese), while Kanji (the more elaborate originally Chinese characters) are generally the most difficult because of the complexity of characters.

Kanji also has multiple pronunciations depending if it's by itself as a Kanji and also what other Kanji it is between or next to.

Japanese grammar though is more like a set pattern, in the way that I think of it. Generally a simple sentence follows a simple pattern. The verbs and nouns can be switched out as long as the corresponding particles are applied.

Listening is also generally very difficult for native English speakers. Being able to listen and decipher what the Japanese speaker is saying is sometimes difficult as there is little oral distinction between certain things (besides particles and verb conjugations).

Some aspects are difficult, some aspects are very easy. It depends of your learning style and how you study it. Good luck, even after studying for three years in an American university, I'm *just* getting by in Japan nowadays.

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Scott Kirwin, lived in Japan (1992-1997)

Answered Tue

Originally Answered: How easy do you think learning Japanese is?

I once read about a guy who wrote a book about learning Japanese. He wanted to call it "How to Learn Japanese in 20 Long Hard Years" but his publisher convinced him to name it something else because they were afraid it wouldn't sell.

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**I always thought that writer was an optimist.**

But don't take my word for it. The US State Department ranks Japanese as a Category 5 language alongside Korean, Arabic and Chinese as the most difficult languages for a native English speaker to learn. [Language Difficulty Ranking](#)

Having studied two of those languages (Mandarin Chinese and Japanese) let me assure you that they know what they're talking about. If you want your butt kicked by a language then study Japanese.

Speaking Japanese is... doable but true mastery is hard. Word order is often Verb-Object (subject - often implied) like some European languages. But what will bring tears to a grown man's eyes is kanji. There are so many of them, so many homonyms, that I often thought the few foreigners I know who speak and write Japanese well are *gods* worthy of having their efforts committed to ballad or song.

One of those *gods* I watched simultaneously translate for Jane Goodall at a visit to a Japanese college. I sat in the audience and heard some of the Japanese students snicker as he stumbled occasionally. This from students who couldn't carry on a conversation in English with me about the weather. I was furious.

But after 5 years in Japan, after the thousands of foreigners I knew and met there I could probably count on my one hand the number of people who mastered Japanese as a native English speaker. And one of them was a nisei.

It is possible, especially if you are only interested in learning basic Japanese without the kanji. But true mastery?



You Can Climb Everest But If You Want A Real Challenge Master Japanese

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Kevin Cameron, Bike & HIike Guide in Rural Japan @ One Life Japan



Answered Jul 4, 2017

Originally Answered: Is Japanese easy to learn?

Chris showed some stats that tell how many hours it takes to learn.

That does not actually show if it is easy or hard.

I spent hour and hours while my friends were out drinking and I was sitting at home and learning kanji (and probably drinking). I spent hours and hours studying vocabulary and translating the newspaper and novels. I spent hours and hours with a Japanese girl I only kind of liked.

But it was pretty easy, in that it was not hard (OK, I "kind of liked her" so...) It was easy because I enjoyed it. Did it take a lot of effort Yah! Did I give up some things like going to parties? Yah. But I also made efforts to get jobs while in the US that would put me into contact with Japanese people. I busied tables at a Japanese restaurant, Easy. I tutored Japanese expats children with their homework - super easy, super fun, and super good money.

It is easy to learn if you are into it.

When I went to University of Michigan, I had come back from a year in Japan. I tested into 3rd year Japanese class. There were ten students. 2nd Year had about 100, 1st year had 200+. What happened? Well, most of the first year students were people who wanted to watch anime or read manga in its pure form. They soon realised it is not that easy. by second year they dropped out. The second most popular reason was that they had or wanted a Japanese girlfriend. I guess they got dumped, or else there were just not enough Japanese girls in Ann Arbor.

By third year, the class I was in consisted of a very dedicated business major, who was learning it for his career. A very dedicated anime fan- I applaud his dedication. Two others like me who really just fell into it but enjoyed it. There was a woman who had Japanese ancestry and she was there to learn the language for personal reasons. I forget the others, but everyone had a specific reason to be there. Anyone without the reason had dropped out.

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Trevor Mearns, Language School Owner

Answered Jul 31, 2017

Originally Answered: Is Japanese easy to learn?

Hi. I've been living in Japan for about 10 years and speak the language well enough to run an English school without any administration or staff to help me. To answer your question: It depends on your approach. Japanese in and of itself is not a particularly complex language although there is a pretty big difference between casual and formal versions of it. It is actually quite direct and minimal a lot of the time. Most of the issues that make it difficult for native English speakers have to do with (1) grammar and (2) nuance/formality of tone.

The grammar is almost completely opposite from English but not quite 100%,

which actually makes it slightly more difficult. The Japanese tend to convey a vast amount of information via verbs which come at the end of the sentence in the language. There is also heavy kanji usage for which there is no correspondent in English and that can take some getting used to. They also tend to drop the subject and other mutually understood elements in a conversation which can make communication highly contextual. It's quite helpful to become familiar with the components of grammar as such before jumping into Japanese. Doing so will help you build an understanding from the ground up so to speak instead of basing your Japanese study off of English, which would be a mistake in my opinion. The languages are impossibly different from one another. Once your familiar with how Japanese flows, however, it is quite logical and consistent as a system. In fact, much more so than English.

As for nuance and formality, this too is quite consistent across the language but often means learning how to convey the same information in two or three different ways depending on how honorific or humble you want to sound. There are also a large number of dialects in the country that vary by region. However, you can rest assured that focusing on “Hyoujungo” 標準語 or “standard Japanese” will be sufficient in the beginning as this will be understood nationwide and will make you perfectly functional in the country although you may struggle if asked to give a formal presentation according to Japanese standards. “Keigo” 敬語 or high/polite Japanese is often difficult even for natives of the country themselves.

I knew basically no Japanese when I moved here and was more or less functional after 2 or 3 years. To build the confidence and ability needed to run a business I studied like crazy to pass the JLPT N2. Native fluency may or may not be attainable but the language does get more comfortable with every passing year. As the saying goes: the more you do it, the easier it gets. I guess the real trick would be just never stop studying once you start.

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William Flanagan, Long-time manga and anime translator

Answered May 17, 2015

Unless you are some kind of prodigy, it is very difficult to learn ANY foreign language as a second language.

Your brain already has a language installed, and it doesn't see any reason to learn another. It will make you sleepy when you're trying to puzzle through sentences in a foreign language even after just a few minutes. After an hour or two your brain will tire out and basically tell you to stop.

If you live in a monolingual country like America, you will find very few chances to speak it, and those who are speakers of the foreign language will most likely also speak at least some of your mother tongue (or else they wouldn't be living there).

You need some form of motivation to effectively learn a foreign language as a second language. A hobby, a significant other who speaks the language, entertainment that can only be found in that language, or because you happen to be living in that foreign country (there are plenty of other motivations, but the motivation has to be strong).

On the other hand, if you ARE one of the language-learning prodigies who can pick up a new language in only a few days, just know that I hate you!! (Okay, I don't hate you, I just envy you in the extreme.)

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**Loh Chee Leong**

It's interesting that the person who wrote this has apparently gained sufficient linguis...



Helge Moulding, Studied Japanese since 2008. I know, I'm still terrible at it.

Answered Mon

Originally Answered: How easy do you think learning Japanese is?

### How easy do you think learning Japanese is?

If you speak English, and you went to Japan and lived among Japanese people, speaking with them all the time and every day, you will learn to speak Japanese as easily as any other language. Japanese has a different grammar, but all languages are forgiving for small mistakes in grammar, and Japanese people, by all accounts, are impressed when foreigners have even just a little knowledge of their language. More importantly, Japanese has mostly sounds that we have in English, so it's not so difficult to pronounce or understand. (Some sounds we don't have in English, not exactly, but we have sounds that are close enough.)

But if you want to write Japanese, that's what makes it one of the most difficult languages in the world to learn. Japan borrowed Chinese characters to write their own language. You need to know about 2,000 of them to adequately read a newspaper. Each character may have more than one reading, more than one sound that is used when reading it, depending on the word that it is part of.

This is such a daunting part of the language that in Japan newspapers might have puzzles that consist of guessing at the meaning and reading of a character.

It's as if the New York Times had a puzzle section with "What do you suppose "soap" means? How would you pronounce it?"

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**Anonymous**

Answered Tue

Originally Answered: How easy do you think learning Japanese is?

Depends on your starting language.

For example if you speak English, then French or Spanish will be easier because

they all have words derived from latin.

However if you speak Russian or Korean, Japanese will be easier to learn than English, Spanish, or French.

The main advantage of learning Japanese over learning English: Kanji! Yes you only need to know 100s of kanjis as opposed to 1000s of words. For example 2000 Kanji is pretty much native University graduate Japanese and with this you can create around 50,000 words. Without ever having seen a word you will know it's meaning. In english and other languages you will have no clue what a new word means, you will have to use a dictionary. Of course if you think the hurdle of learning 2000 kanji is greater than the hurdle of learning 40,000 words then go with the latter.. keep in mind the kanji look to some degree like the word they mean, whereas the syllables do not.

That said I think to learn any language to be able to work in it takes around 7 years of moderate study. Maybe 3 with full time devotion such as working in Japan and using it every day. Sometimes you will be lucky to work earlier on before you have mastered it.

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Luuk Schuring, lived in Japan (2016)

Answered Jul 6, 2017

Originally Answered: Is Japanese easy to learn?

As Kevin said, it depends on your motivation. Japanese is a difficult language to learn to speak *well*. Sure. But that doesn't mean it's difficult to *learn*. You can learn it in hundreds of ways. Make sure you have people to practice with. Speak Japanese casually with someone.

And a tip I always give to people, and something I still do: read a book. Personally, I love the Harry Potter stories, and I am rereading them all in Japanese. Currently 100 pages into Prisoner of Azkaban, and having the time of a lifetime just figuring out all the words and characters all the time.

(For those who think this is impossible for them: Harry Potter is a children's book, meaning the furigana / yomikata are written in kana next to the kanji.)

Basically, I never "learn" a language. I just "do" a language. The knowledge will come passively that way.

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