

Quick Japanese Lesson 2: Top 10 Most Useful Japanese Words and Phrases

In this quick Japanese lesson, I'm going to introduce you to my top 10 most useful Japanese words and phrases. Learn these 10 words and simple phrases and you'll instantly be able to navigate around Japan and impress your Japanese hosts as a polite, well-mannered gaijin!

If you need help pronouncing these words, please refer to **Japanese Language Learning Tips - 25 Japanese Words You Already Know!**, which includes a brief explanation on proper Japanese pronunciation. Now on to our lesson!

1) Sumimasen (su-mi-ma-sen)

(すみません)

This might be the most useful all-purpose word in the Japanese language. Depending upon the context, it can mean excuse me (as in "I need to get by you"), sorry (as in "oops, didn't mean to bump into you), or thank you (as in "thanks for doing that for me"). You'll start hearing this word the moment you arrive in Japan, and pretty soon you'll figure out how and when to use it,

2) Dozo (dou-zo)

(どうぞ)

Dozo means "please" and is used to offer something or give permission, as in "go right ahead" or "be my guest", but it does NOT mean please as in "may I?!"! Beginners often get this one mixed up so be sure you understand the difference.

3) Onegai-shimasu (o-ne-ga-i shi-ma-su)

(おねがいします)

This word is used to say please in Japanese or request something, as in "may I please do this?" or "can you please do something for me?". This phrase is commonly used in Japanese martial arts classes when requesting a teacher or training partner to teach a technique or spar together.

4) Hajimemashite (ha-ji-me-ma-shi-te)

(はじめまして)

This word literally means "it's a beginning," but is actually used as a ritualized greeting expression to mean "nice to meet you." Always use this expression when meeting someone for the first time.

5) Yoroshiku onegai-shimasu (yo-ro-shi-ku o-ne-ga-i shi-ma-su)

(よろしくおねがいします)

This is another phrase that is used at the end of the ritualized greeting to mean something like "now that we've just met each other, let's be friends and have a good relationship". It is also used as a more polite form of "onegai shimasu" to mean something like "thanks in advance for what you are about to do for me".

6) Itadakimasu (i-ta-da-ki-ma-su)

(いただきます)

This is an important word that must be used for proper Japanese dining etiquette. It is a ritualized expression used right before you are about to eat anything meaning "I humbly and appreciatively receive this food". When dining with Japanese friends or hosts, be sure to use this expression before digging into your meal!

7) Kudasai (ku-da-sa-i)

(ください)

Alone, this word is an imperative meaning "give me". However, when combined with other words, it becomes a polite way of asking for something or requesting some action. For instance "kore kudasai" means "please give me this", and "oshiete kudasai" means "please teach me or tell me".

8) Wakarimasen (wa-ka-ri-ma-sen)

(わかりません)

During your first trip to Japan, you'll find yourself in many situations where you don't understand something. This word is used to simply say "I don't understand".

9) Wakarimashita (wa-ka-ri-ma-shi-ta)

(わかりました)

In contrast to the above, this word is used to express that you DO understand something someone is telling you.

10) Arigato gozaimasu (a-ri-ga-tou go-za-i-ma-su)

(ありがとうございました)

Finally, you need to know how to politely say thank you in Japanese, and this is how you say it. "Arigato" alone also means thank you (more like "thanks!"), but is a bit less formal, so add "gozaimasu" to make your thank you a suitably polite expression of appreciation.

Use this list of my Top 10 Most Useful Japanese Words and phrases and you'll find yourself able to nimbly navigate through any Japanese social situation!

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