

Putting Ease Into Japanese

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Japan is where millennial-old traditions meet new age technology, where karate, temples, samurai, geishas, sumo wrestling and Shinto meet Sony, Nintendo, bullet trains, androids, anime and toilets with musical options. For anyone interested in technology, pop culture or aspects of Asian history, Japan is the place to be.

After two years of studying Japanese at UNH, I've decided to test my skills in a high stakes environment — a homestay in Tokyo where I'll be living with a Japanese family and speaking only Japanese for a month. While relishing the excitement of this new adventure, I realized that despite Japanese being offered at four levels, an Asian Studies minor program, study abroad options in several Asian countries and amazing faculty, I am in a small pool of students studying Japanese at UNH.

Many native English speakers perceive Japanese as too difficult to attempt, or they give up soon after beginning. The intimidation

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of three alphabets, stacking verb conjugations, various forms of politeness and a culture vastly different from the United States keeps many people from reaching their potential.

The thing is, anyone and everyone can learn it, and it can even be enjoyable. I want to share the ways my classmates and I have stayed motivated enough to soon enter a third year of Japanese and the kinds of things that lead people like me to fly 13 hours to the home of one of the world's most difficult languages.

Learn About and Appreciate Japanese Culture

Studying a language without learning about at least one of its cultures is like studying medicine without looking at the human body. It's not the enriching experience it could be, and it doesn't work in practice.

Many aspects of the Japanese language come from the culture's traditions and heritage, and this makes it easier to comprehend. For example, various politeness conjugations take root in beliefs of social hierarchy and respect. You wouldn't know why you have to add an honorific suffix to the word for older sister or why speaking to your boss requires a different verb conjugation than speaking to your best friend without understanding this. You also wouldn't understand why there are more than five conjugations used to apologize to someone based on their relationship to you.

Appreciate the Art and Achievements of the Japanese

"Seven Samurai," "Spirited Away," "The Wind-up Bird Chronicle," "The Tale of Genji," "The Great Wave Off Kanagawa" — Japanese film, music, literature and art are endless and rich.

And it's not just in Japan: Quentin Tarantino and George Lucas have taken elements from Japanese films ("Star Wars" is basically samurai in space), and Japanese video games dominate markets around the world. Japanese art influenced Vincent Van Gogh,

Claude Monet, James Tissot and many other painters, and Japanese animation is internationally renowned. “The Hunger Games” is closely linked to Kashoun Takami’s “Battle Royale” and both Pokémon and Hello Kitty are from Japan.

Japanese art and achievements are everywhere in the U.S. For example, karaoke parties and CD players are both Japanese creations.

Learning about your interests and using them to motivate your studies makes learning Japanese fun and rewarding. This can lead to research opportunities, adventures and increased knowledge about the things you’ve always loved.

Quizlet, Mnemonic Devices and Conjugation Charts

They are your best friends. Create them. Use them. Worship them. Love them.

Connect With Other Learners

[Tofugu](#), [GaijinPot](#) and [Japanese Stack Exchange](#) are excellent resources for hearing from other native English speakers about tricks, tips and other methods for learning Japanese. Connecting with people in your class and setting up study groups or bonding time is a great way to feel supported through the journey. They may even help you with your weaknesses and show you new ways to approach the material, which will save you time, energy and stress.

It’s Not Easy. It’s Rewarding.

After more than 230 hours of class, I sometimes still forget how to say “cat.” About 40 flashcards, around 12 kanji and anywhere from three to five grammar points every two weeks can make it frustrating to remember something you learned more than a year ago. Reading katakana and realizing it’s derived from a French

word you've never heard before or trying to figure out how many verb conjugations are in one sentence ending can be a deterrent.

Studying Japanese requires ambition, dedication, pacing and being kind to yourself. It teaches you more about who you are as a person and what you value in education. You will ask more of yourself and learn when to ask for help. New possibilities, friends and more understanding of the world will be available. Your strengths and weaknesses will become obvious and allow you to become a better student.

Attempting one of the world's most difficult languages is an accomplishment in itself and something to be proud of, whether or not you choose to continue.

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