



NIHONGO  
SHARK

# HACKING JAPANESE SUPERCOURSE

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**Formatting Disclaimer:** This guide has both a lot of images and a lot of pages with huge blank spaces. As such, if you try to print this, you're probably going to hate me. Originally, I intended to format images to fit to full pages, but ultimately I decided not to, as this guide will be updated regularly (and updates would void any formatting changes, anyways). I recommend reading this guide on a computer or an electronic device, as it includes a lot of links. If you're one of those "paper" people, though, I wish you and your printer good luck. 頑張ってください。

**Affiliate Disclaimer:** There are some affiliate links in this guide. However, I never recommend a product that I don't believe in and pay for myself, and I never include content or products simply for the possibility of financial reward. The primary goal of this guide is to help as many people as I can to learn Japanese. As such, I only ever recommend study tools and resources that I would recommend to my own friends and family, with no hope or possibility of monetary gain. That said, it would be nice if I could create Japanese learning materials full-time someday, so I do include affiliate links when applicable in the hopes that this guide will fund such endeavors.

**Awesome People Wanted:** Since the realm of language-learning is ever-evolving, especially with the technological advances we see around us today, this guide is always a work in progress. There are always new features, new study methods, new tools, new amazing websites, teachers, gurus, ninja, and sexy anime princesses. If you ever come across study tools or resources that you think should be included in this guide or shared with the [NihongoShark.com](#) community, please don't hesitate to [contact me here](#). Pointing out perceived flaws and shortcomings is welcome, too.

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# INTRO

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Yo! I'm Niko. Or some of my friends call me Nikolai... or Nick. My older sister is pretty much the only person in the world who calls me Nicholas, but you can call me that too, if you feel like it.



(That's me on the left... obviously.)

Anyways, I thought that maybe before I got into this ridiculously long study guide, I should give a quick overview of my tumultuous, rocky affair with the Japanese language.

Though I'm kind of embarrassed to admit it, I grew up as a classic child *otaku* [=Japan nerd]. I was a ninja for Halloween five years in a row. Seriously. I asked for swords for my birthday. Ninja stars. I kept track of the Japanese video game scene like a stalker

watching his ex-girlfriend.

Needless to say, I was pretty interested in everything Japanese.

Still, I didn't start studying Japanese until I was in my early twenties. It sounds ridiculous, because **I always wanted to learn Japanese**. It was my dream. But people had always told me that it was an impossible language to learn. And I, not knowing the first thing about learning a foreign language, believed them. **I just didn't think I could do it**. Flash forward to my senior year of college. I had an open elective course. So, I took a look through the school's course catalog, and... there it was: Japanese101.

It's probably impossible, I thought. I shouldn't even try.

But then, hey, why not? It could be fun. That was back in 2008.

2008. The birth of an obsession.

Once I'd had one taste of the Japanese language, that was it for me. I studied nonstop. **It was ineffective studying, but it was obsessive**. Japanese journal. Writing out the same kanji 8,000 times. Buying every book on mastering Japanese I could find. Watching anime. Trying (and failing) to read manga. Playing Japanese-language video games. Classes. Flashcards. Leaving my girlfriend of five years to move to Japan (not joking).

What a mess.

I spent about two years studying Japanese, including 6 months at a Japanese language school in Tokyo.

Then, though, I did something that I'll always regret: **I quit studying Japanese**. I didn't have enough money to keep studying in Japan. Looking back now, I'm sure I could have done *something* to stay in Japan. But I wasn't even sure what I was doing to begin with. I didn't feel like I was making any progress in my studies, anyways. So, I quit. I went back to California and pretended that I didn't care about learning Japanese anymore.

About a year later, I decided to volunteer for three months at an after-school program for disadvantaged children... in Cusco, Peru. Before going, I spent about 3 months studying Spanish. By this time, I had developed quite an intricate study system for learning languages. And, to my surprise, it proved to be extremely effective for Spanish. I had no problems whatsoever communicating in Spanish during my time in Peru. Well, except for the first few days when I was totally overwhelmed by the Spanish *everything*.



(Me, in Peru. I'm the goon in the hat.)

I couldn't believe how simple it was for me to reach a comfortable level in Spanish. I mean, three months?! I felt like I was onto something. Maybe I was onto a study system that actually worked for me.

And, well, a much more evolved version of that study system is what I'm presenting in this guide. Because, yes, **I did eventually manage to learn Japanese**.

Here's a brief timeline of my progression in Japanese...

- ✓ 2008: I sucked at Japanese.
- ✓ 2009: I sucked at Japanese.
- ✓ 2010-2012: I quit studying Japanese *completely*.
- ✓ *Summer, 2012*: I started studying Japanese *again*, and I learned all **2,000+ of the Joyo kanji** in 3 months (some of them I relearned).
- ✓ *Fall 2012*: I learned roughly **5,000 vocabulary words**.
- ✓ *December, 2012*: I **passed JLPT N2**.
- ✓ *2013*: I learned roughly **10,000 Japanese words**.
- ✓ *March 2014*: I founded a site *written in Japanese* about learning English, which currently has **over 30,000 monthly Japanese readers**.
- ✓ *July 2014*: I **passed JLPT N1** (with over double the minimum scores in every category).
- ✓ *September 2014*: I got a job my **first job as a translator**—translating a book of 3,000 common Japanese expressions into English equivalents for a Japanese publishing company. You can see the book [here on Amazon](#).

If you go to Japan, you will meet people that have spent decades there, but they cannot speak Japanese. Those are the types of people who will tell you that you can't do it. *Don't listen to what they say, though. Japanese is not impossible.* It's not even that hard, really. I like to think of it as walking across, say, the United States. Coast to coast that would be almost a 3,000 mile walk.

It *sounds* impossible.

But is it really that hard to walk 3,000 miles if you spread it out over a year?

Well, yeah. That's like 8+ miles a day. Still pretty hard. But it's *feasible*. And I think learning Japanese is the same way. **It's not easy, but it's definitely feasible.** You just need to make sure that you're walking EVERY. SINGLE. DAY. Also, you need a map to ensure that you're walking in the right direction. And, really, that's the aim of this book. It won't explicitly teach you a lot of Japanese, but **it will teach you *how to learn Japanese quickly and effectively while still enjoying yourself.***

Here goes nothing...

# THE 1 YEAR MASTERY PLAN

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It took me years of trial and error before I realized which tools were the right tools for me to learn Japanese as quickly as possible.

I've taken quite a few Japanese classes over the years, and every single one focuses on four things: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This makes sense. That's what it means to be totally fluent in a language, right? You can understand it, speak it, read it, and write it. There's one gigantic problem with this, though: **The definition of fluency is not a method for attaining fluency.**

That stuff works eventually. It is studying, after all. But it is so, so, so slow.

We want to learn Japanese *fast*.

And to learn any language fast, you only need to focus on *two* things, each of which we can divide into two categories:

1. Comprehension (by mastering listening and vocab)
2. Production (by mastering grammar and speaking)

My goal is always to improve my skill in these two areas using time-efficient methods applied consistently over an extended length of time. **If your study methods are relevant to your level and goals, time-efficient, and you study consistently, then you are guaranteed to improve.**

You can't interact with a language unless you understand it, and that's why we need to (1) boost our comprehension. You can't use a language unless you have the tools to produce it, which is why we need to (2) boost our speaking and sentence construction (i.e. grammar) skills.

So let's do those two things.

Ultimately, I'd rather not spend too much time or space about theory, however, as this is meant to be a practical guide.

### **Theories About Language Learning**

I think I should clarify something here. When talking about learning languages, a lot of people have a lot of different theories.

Person A is really good at [French, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, whatever], and he used Study System A. So, he tells everyone that they should do Study System A. *It's the best way to learn [Chinese].* Or something like that.

But what if I hate System A? Does that mean that I'll never learn a language? No. It just means that Study System A, while good for some, totally sucks for me. Who cares? I'll find my own way. That's part of the fun.

Anyways, I'm Person N right now. And I'm presenting Study System N. But if you hate it, then please don't do it. **If you hate studying Japanese, you will quit studying Japanese eventually. If you quit studying Japanese, you will not become fluent.**

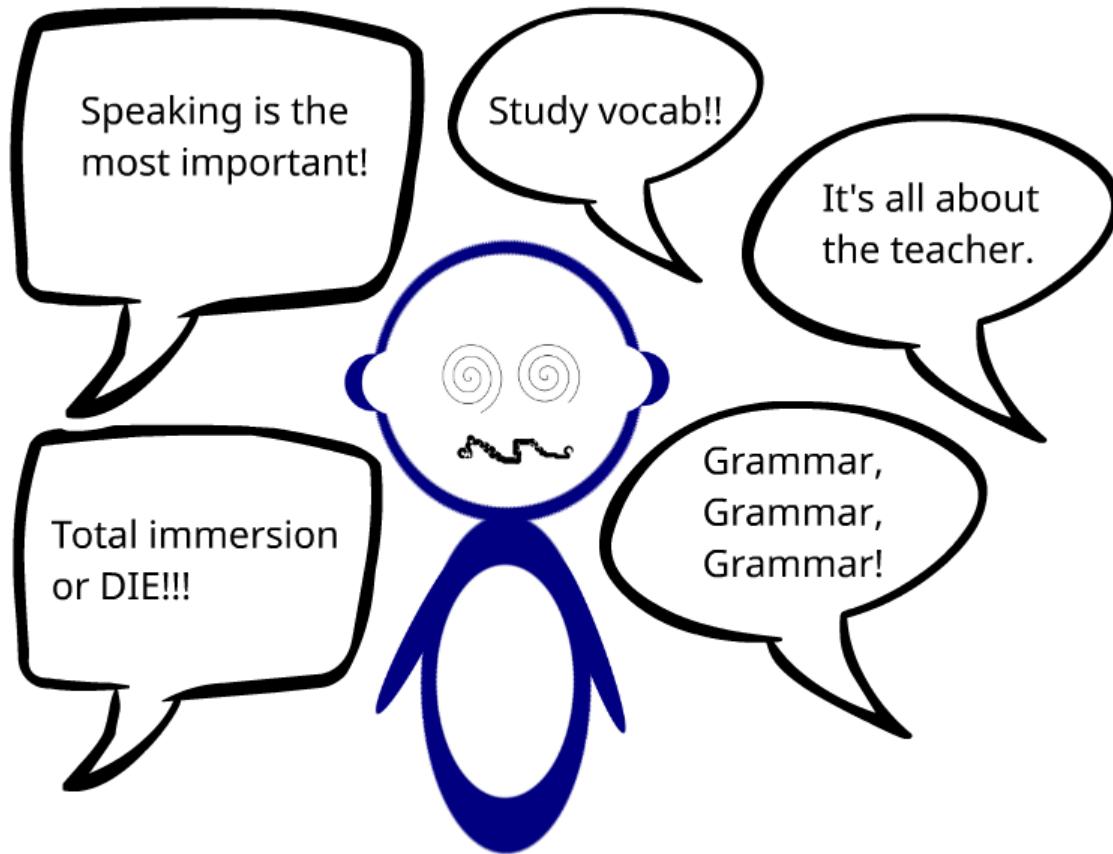
Coming back to the United States, people think that I'm fluent in Spanish *because* I went to Peru. That's simply not true, though.

*"I always say that the only way to learn a language is to just go live in the country where they speak it. Just get thrown in there, and you'll pick it up in no time."* – Person who speaks no foreign languages.

For me personally, I don't like focusing on speaking or writing much in the preliminary stages of learning a language (although I will introduce you to the tools necessary to do so). Yes, writing and speaking are absolutely essential skills, and you will have to learn them. But they are not a *productive use of time* until you have solid vocab, grammar, and listening skills.

On the other hand, I do have friends that focused primarily on speaking from the start who are

very good at speaking Japanese, so that too is a viable method. Later on in this guide, I'll list resources and sites that give advice on this sort of study approach.



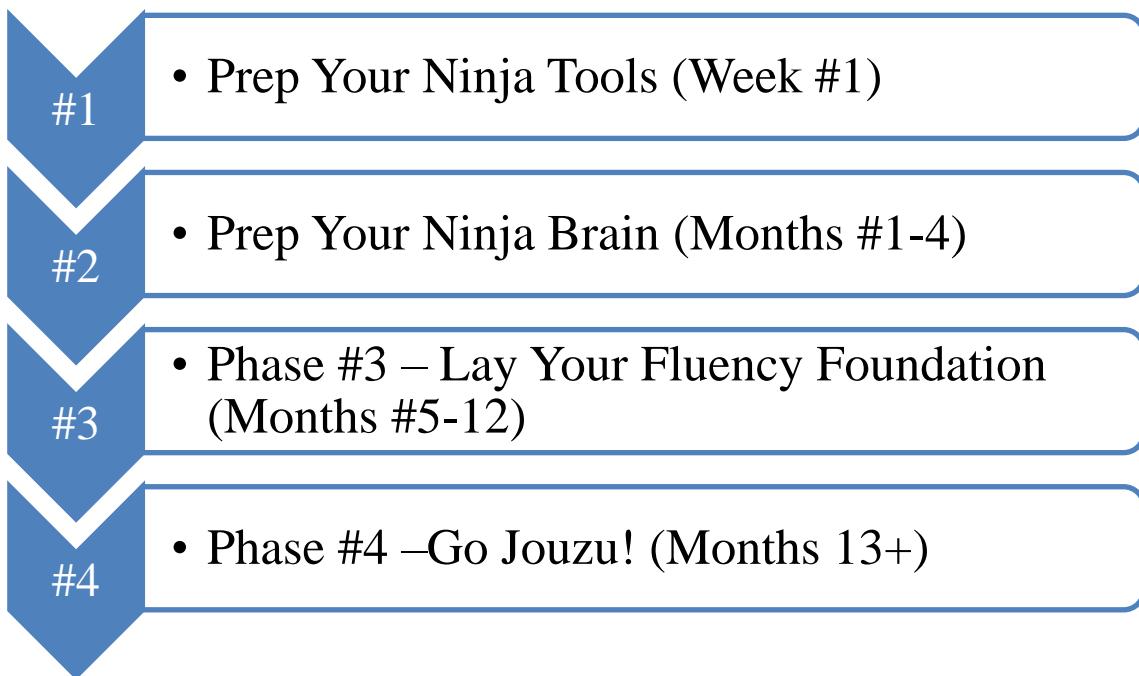
The point is, **don't try to follow advice that you don't want to follow**. Obviously I believe that the guidance in this book is sound and effective, but it would be naïve of me to claim that it's for everyone. Instead, I ask that you take a nice, long look at my study system. Just try it out. See how it feels. Like a couch at a furniture store.

I will provide you with alternative study tools and tips pretty much every step of the way. This is your study journey, so it's up to you which path you will take.

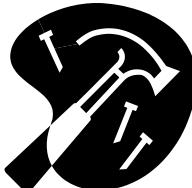
If you want to take my recommended path, though, then we're looking at a study system characterized by 4 Phases and 1 Underlying Principle.

# The 4 Phases

## The 1-Year Mastery Plan



### *Phase #1 – Prep Your Ninja Tools (Week #1)*



This Phase of the Mastery Plan should take no more than one week (a day, if you're fast), and it will set you up for fast-track studying throughout the rest of the year. Mostly it's just about getting all of the tools that will prove invaluable for the duration of this year of studying.

### *Phase #2 – Prep Your Ninja Brain (Months #1-4)*



I won't get into it too much here, but Phase #2 is the most difficult part of this 1-year study plan. Or maybe I should say: **it's the easiest part to fail**. In the first few months of your year of studying, Phase #2 will have you master some core aspects of the Japanese language, which will propel your studying in Phase #3.

### *Phase #3 – Lay Your Fluency Foundation (Months #5-12)*



Phase #3 is all about building up a gigantic foundation for you to achieve fast fluency. This means learning a ton of vocab, a ton of grammar concepts, and listening to a quite a few audio lessons. Since you'll have prepped in Phases 1 and 2, though, you'll be achieving these goals at an incredibly fast rate.

#### *Phase #4 – Go Jouzu! (Months 13+)*



For those that make it this far, this book will become obsolete. In Phase #4, you'll start focusing on the aspects of Japanese that you are intrinsically interested in. In other words, you'll start having a lot of fun with this language.

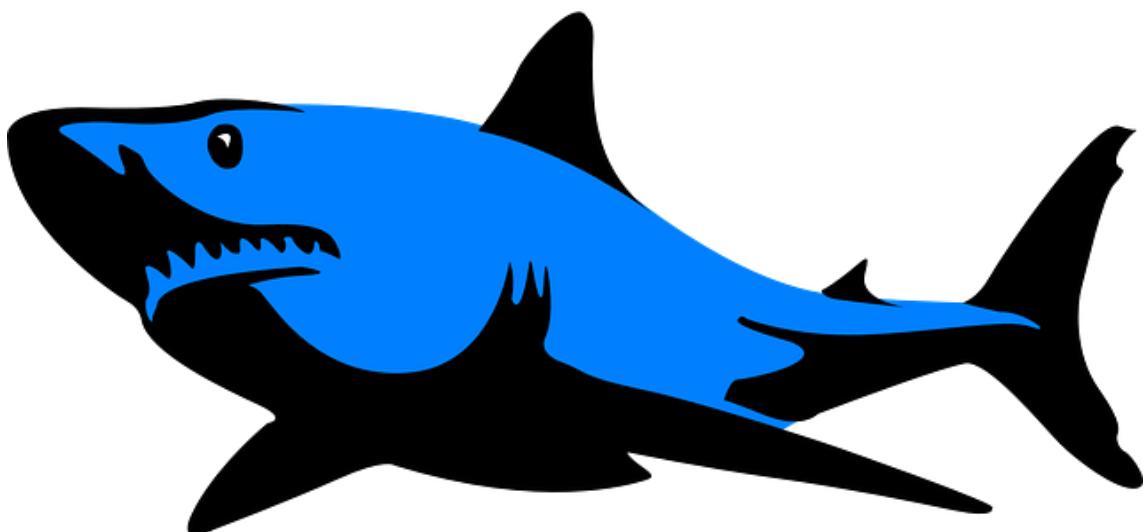
If you've followed through with everything in the first three phases, then you should be functionally fluent upon reaching Phase #4.

### *The 1 Principle*

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There is only one principle to this Japanese Mastery Plan:

**Never stop.**



A shark never stops swimming. You never stop studying Japanese.

Don't get me wrong. You can have a life. You can learn other things. But *you cannot go a single day without studying Japanese at least a little bit.*

Details on the mental, digital, and physical tools required to stick to this study plan make up most of Phase #1. Details on the specific study process make up Phases #2 and #3.

Swim, swim, swim. You are crossing an ocean.

### *The Importance of Not Quitting*

Every person who has ever “mastered” a language has one thing in common:

#### **Thousands of hours of language exposure.**

If you look online, there are all kinds of theories as to the best way to learn a language. Some people will tell you that the best way is to get a girlfriend or boyfriend that speaks that language. Others will say that it’s impossible unless you live in a country where the language is spoken. Other people have different methods than me for learning Japanese.

It doesn’t matter. **The only thing that matters is consistent, structured, long-term language exposure.** Period. *Anyone that presents you with any language-learning method that does not contain hundreds (or sometimes thousands) of hours of language exposure is not to be trusted.*

It takes *thousands of hours* to learn Japanese. It takes *thousands of hours* to learn Chinese. It takes *hundreds of hours* to learn even the easiest of languages for English speakers. [Here’s a chart](#) that approximates hours required to learn various languages, courtesy of [the Foreign Service Institute](#).

**Effective language-learning is measured in hours, not years.** Sustained, structured, and consistent accumulation of level-appropriate language exposure will always result in fluency. And I think that’s why it’s really important to enjoy this journey.

[Studies show](#) that willpower is an exhaustible resource. That’s why we fail on our diets when we’re tired. That’s why it’s harder to go to the gym at the end of the day. And that’s why you’ll quit studying if you don’t enjoy studying.

**There is nothing more important than not quitting.** And having fun is the best way to avoid quitting. So let’s enjoy this journey. Eventually, you’ll come to experience a kind of language-study high, which is such an amazing feeling, honestly.

# PHASE #1 - PREP YOUR NINJA TOOLS

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# Phase #1 Breakdown

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## Mindset Prep

- Metal Preparation for This Awesome Journey

## Vocab Prep

- Ninja Tool #1 - Apps & Programs for Writing and Pronunciation
- Ninja Tool #2 - Anki Flashcards
- Ninja Tool #3 - Remembering the Kanji
- Ninja Tool #4 - Reviewing the Kanji

## Listening Prep

- Ninja Tool #5 - JapanesePod101

## Reference Prep

- Ninja Tool #6 - Japanese Language Packs
- Ninja Tool #7 - Online Dictionaries
- Ninja Tool #8 - Web Browser Plugins
- Ninja Tool #9 - Smartphone Apps

## Grammar Prep

- Ninja Tool #10 - Bunkou Books

## Speaking Prep

- Ninja Tool #11 - Caveman Conversation Course
- Ninja Tool #12 - Online Japanese Lessons
- Ninja Tool #13 - Online Language Exchanges

This Japanese mastery system is all about smart learning.

Part of smart learning is making sure that you have the best resources at your disposal, and that's what I'll lay out in this section.

In Phase #1 I'll be bombarding you with the ninja tools you'll need to make it on this journey. In this phase, you don't really learn any Japanese. That's why this Phase should only take a couple of days. A week, at most.

Specifically, we'll prep ourselves with the best tools for:

- Not Quitting
- Vocab & Kanji
- Listening
- Reference
- Grammar

Sound good? Yoshi! Let's go!

First off, we have... Mindset Prep!

## Mindset Prep



*(Teach me, Buddha)*

The Mindset Prep section of this guide is all about getting yourself prepared for the challenges that await you as you tackle Japanese.

People (including me) talk about speaking practice and flashcards and interactive study videos and lessons and all these things that are “the keys to learning a language.” But I think that, more than anything, learning a language is a battle of will. It’s like losing 100 pounds, like writing a novel—it’s simple, but it’s really, really, really difficult.

***Just because something is simple, that does not mean that it is easy.***

*- Niko (quoting someone from somewhere that I don't remember)*

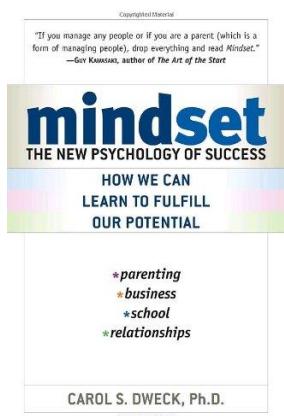
I know that if I have a negative caloric intake, I will lose weight. I know that if I write ten pages per day, eventually I’ll have written a novel. But, well, beer bellies. No novels. No money. That stuff’s easier said than done, yeah?

**Learning a language is about becoming the type of person who learns languages.** It's about becoming the type of person who loses weight, the type of person who writes novels—it's about becoming the type of person who does great things through *consistent and persistent application of systems*.

I'm not a life coach, but in the Mindset Prep section, I'll talk about the key factors that kept me going in my struggle with Japanese. Also, just some generally awesome advice that I wish I'd had when I started out on my own Japanese-acquisition journey.

## *Change Your Mindset*

So a few years ago, I came across this really awesome book:



### *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

by Carol S. Dweck, PhD

In the book, Dweck talks about the mindsets that people have as they approach learning, work, relationships, and, well, life in general. The really interesting thing is that she divides peoples mindsets into two categories: (1) fixed mindsets and (2) growth mindsets.

Dweck puts it this way:

*In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort. They're wrong.*

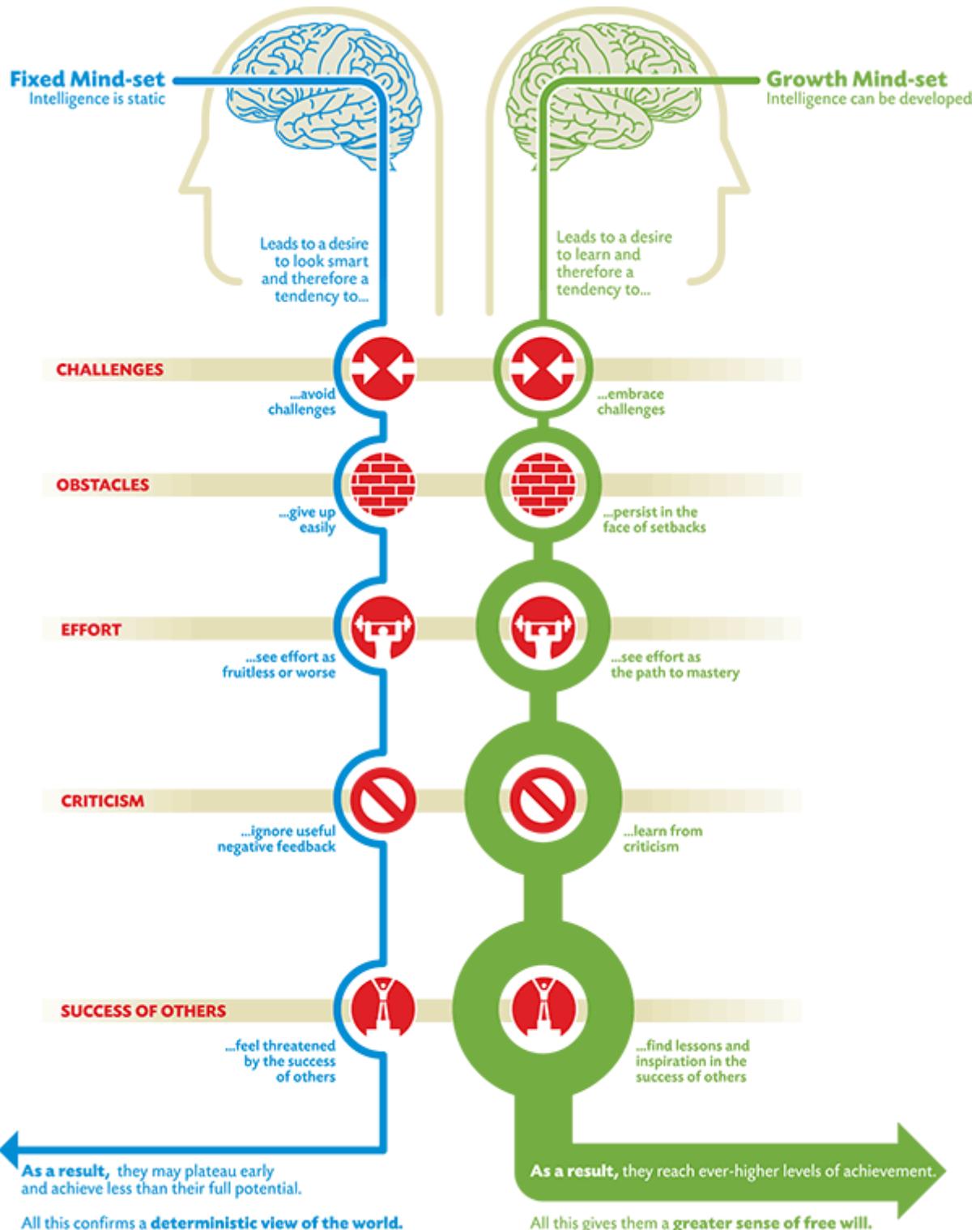
*In a growth mindset, people believe that their most*

*basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities.*

*Teaching a growth mindset creates motivation and productivity in the worlds of business, education, and sports. It enhances relationships. When you read Mindset, you'll see how.*

*- Carol S. Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

Here's a really awesome graphic by [Nigel Holmes](#) that illustrates the two:



GRAPHIC BY NIGEL HOLMES

Reading about Dweck's two types of mindsets, it was really easy for me to imagine

people I know—loved ones in my life that fall into one of these two categories. Some of them have a fixed mindset. Some of them have a growth mindset. And in thinking about those people, I noticed that the ones I respect the most *always* seem to have a growth mindset.

I'd like to have a growth mindset, too. And I constantly try to remind myself that I can get better. I can learn from mistakes. My favorite thing about Dweck's book is that she presents these two mindsets like choices. If you want to have a growth mindset, then that option is available to you.

I think it goes without saying, but to learn Japanese, you're probably going to want to have a growth mindset. **Talent might be something that people acquire naturally, but skill only comes from hard work.** And, lucky for us, Japanese is a *skill*. So we can learn it, make it ours.

If anyone is interested in reading her book, here's a link: [\*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success\*](#), by Carol S. Dweck, PhD.

Anyways, assuming you have that growth mindset, you know that it is theoretically possible for you to master Japanese if you really go for it. And the most effective way to go for it is... consistent persistence.

### *Consistent Persistence*

I already talked about this, but the most important thing in the world is that you **study consistently over a long period of time.**

However, doing so requires a huge amount of effort. A huge amount of discipline. A huge amount of motivation.

Sounds horrible, yeah? But it's actually not that bad, if you take the right approach. That is, if you have a good mindset.

Imagine that this wheel is your study system:



Anything that we can call “studying” goes inside of this wheel. Reading textbooks; attending classes; listening to audio lessons; doing flashcards; having conversations with friends, teachers, co-workers—all of these go inside of the wheel. (As a quick note, reading this study guide does *not* go inside of the wheel, because we are not studying Japanese right now. Please see the [notes about Active VS Productive studying](#) introduced later on in the Mindset Prep section.)

In my experience, all of the types of productive studying fit into three categories:

1. **Learning**—This is talking about any time we put *new language* into our brains. A word you hadn’t heard before. A new grammar concept. The correct pronunciation of a word.
2. **Review**—This is talking about *not forgetting* language that we have already learned. There are active forms of review (such as flashcards), and then there are passive forms of review (like hearing words that you’ve learned in a conversation, or recalling words as you read novels, newspapers, etc.).
3. **Practice**—This is talking about *making sentences* in Japanese. Talking to teachers and friends, struggling to find the right word, the right way to express yourself. Writing essays, articles, emails, journals. Anytime we take the Japanese swirling

around in our brains and try to put it out into the world, we are practicing.

So this is what our new wheel looks like:



Every time you turn that wheel, you will get better at Japanese. Days that you don't turn the wheel, you don't get better at Japanese.

It really is that simple.

Let's say that you want to ride your bike across the continental United States. A Zen monk told you that if you rode your bike across the US, you would automatically be super fluent at Japanese. Sweet!

What's the catch?

Well, you have to ride this bike:

## N-3000 SUPER STUDY BIKE



Days you ride this bike are days that you get closer to completing your goals. If you go a day without riding the bike, then that's one more day that you won't be at your destination (=fluency).

Smart studying, which is what this guide is really all about, means that you have a very nice bike. It has gears so that you can get over hills. You can go further by pedaling less. It's less likely to break down. You can ride it much further without getting nearly as worn out.

Consistent studying is like riding this bike every day. Your muscles grow. It gets easier. The first day that you ride a bike, it might be really difficult to go eight miles. But if you rode the bike eight miles every day, then I'm guessing that after a few months it would seem really easy, because you get stronger. Learning a language is very similar. **It gets easier.** I promise, it gets easier.

This study system will require a lot of initial effort, but **the idea is to get to a level where you enjoy studying Japanese as quickly as possible.**

For example, I can watch a TV show, understand it, enjoy it, and I'm passively studying Japanese. But **I couldn't do this when I first started studying**. I wasn't even close. I can read a novel in Japanese, and it's relaxing and entertaining, much like reading a novel in English is. But **I couldn't do this when I first started studying**.

I want to help people to get to that level, too. Because there were so many times when I almost gave up (and a few times that I actually did). But *it really is possible to reach a level where studying is not a chore*. Instead, it becomes integrated into your life, the same way your native language is. You've just got to keep pedaling that bike. Keep going. Turn those wheels 100,000 times if you have to.

Because those wheels will take you somewhere.

### *Is Japanese Hard to Learn?*

This is kind of a difficult question to answer. But the simple answer is... yes... and no.

I think that learning Japanese is extremely difficult, but it's only extremely difficult in the sense that it takes a long time. Anything that requires a consistent effort over a long period of time is going to be difficult.

As a language, though, I think that Japanese is relatively easy to learn.

せつめい  
説明させていただきます

*setsumei sasete itadakimasu*

[Allow me to explain.](#)

### [Reasons People Say Japanese Is Difficult](#)

Here I'll give a brief breakdown of some misguided claims that people tend to make about the difficulty of the Japanese language...

***The kanji are impossible!***

- *Negative Nancy*

I think that this is the single biggest misconception of the Japanese language. I'm guilty of thinking that the kanji were impossible, too. I used to hate studying kanji. It felt like I was trying to swim across the ocean, the shore nowhere in sight.

Now, though, I have a much different perspective. I think that the kanji are one of the simplest aspects of learning Japanese. And, not only that, knowing the kanji makes Japanese *so much easier*. They are a foundation for rapid vocab acquisition. They are a tool for guessing the meaning of words that you have never seen before. There is an [interesting article](#) on the website [JapaneseRuleof7.com](http://JapaneseRuleof7.com) that talks about how the avoidance of kanji in the Japanese classroom is a huge mistake, and I totally agree with him.

I'll go into a lot of detail about the kanji in Phase #2, but for now I'll just say one thing:

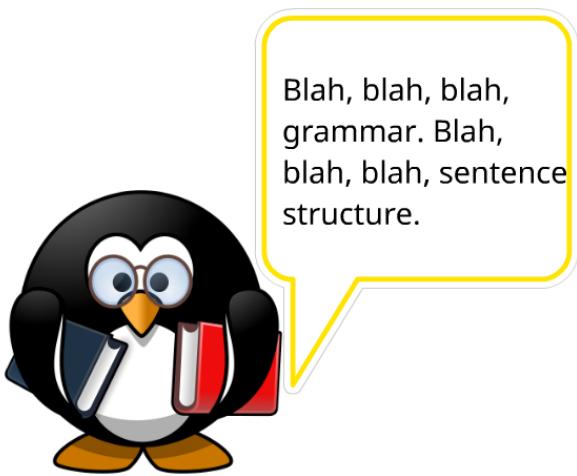
**I memorized 2,000 kanji in under three months, and I have had *multiple* readers from my site that have done the same.**

So, no, the kanji are not impossible.

***The grammar is crazy!***

*- Person Who Knows Very Little About Japanese Grammar*

This one is kind of true, honestly. I remember a long, long time ago, I bought an intro to basic Japanese grammar book (I used to buy all sorts of useless books). And in the first chapter, they talked about sentence order, saying something like, English is “Subject -> Verb -> Object (SVO),” but Japanese is “Subject -> Object -> Verb (SOV).” And I’m pretty sure I read another book that phrased it this way: “Blah, blah, blah.”



Gross. Why did I try to learn that as a beginner? What a waste of time.

Yeah, grammar is certainly *different*. But I don't think that logical explanations of grammar concepts are useful for learning a language. Sure, it's useful to read that explanation at least once. But it's a disaster if you try to think about those things while speaking or writing Japanese. Do you think about the subject, verb, and object of every sentence that you say in English? Can you identify them while still maintaining a native-speed conversation? If so, you're amazing. But don't waste your time trying to do that in Japanese.

Japanese grammar is much different than English, but it's also very, very simple. And after you've used it for a while, you shouldn't need to think about how to form solid, complete, accurate sentences. It will just feel natural.

### Reasons Japanese Is Actually Easy

Now we can go to the fun part—reasons Japanese is easy! Yay!

***Japanese pronunciation is very simple.***

*- All the cool kids*

Like, so simple.

Consider this:

- Japanese has 5 vowel sounds.
- English has 19 vowel sounds!
- Japanese has 18 consonant sounds.
- English has 24 consonant sounds!

(consonant sounds are estimates, as they are difficult to count)

Put simply, a native English speaker should be able to pronounce all of the sounds of Japanese with minimal difficulty.

***Japanese has a shallow orthographic depth.***

*- Professors of Linguistics*

Say what?

Orthographic depth is the degree to which a language is spelled the same way that it sounds. A language with a deep orthographic depth is difficult to read phonetically, as many of the sounds will vary. English is like this, and it's a nightmare for foreign learners. For example, how many of these words sound the same, or different...

- Query, very
- Tow, vow, row, bow, bow
- Monkey, donkey
- Grasp, wasp
- Though, through, plough, dough, cough

Students often ask me, "Why is English spelling so complicated?" I answer by sweating nervously. Or saying, "Because, of course." Or, "Shut up, you."

Honestly, I feel so bad for people trying to learn English sometimes.

Languages with a shallow orthographic depth are the opposite of this—words are almost always pronounced exactly as they are written. For example, Spanish has a shallow orthographic depth. If you know the basics of pronouncing Spanish syllables (which can vary by regions), then you should be able to read almost any passage aloud.

And, lucky us, Japanese also has an *extremely* shallow orthographic depth. **Word sounds are always pronounced exactly as they are spelled.** So if you can read the characters, then you should be able to read almost any passage aloud accurately.

There is one exception to this, unfortunately, and it's the problem of Japanese intonation and rhythm, which can be a bit tricky to master. But mastering this mostly comes naturally from language exposure, so you don't need to worry about it too much. (I'll talk about this more in the [pronunciation section in Phase #2!](#))

The reason that I think having a shallow orthographic depth makes a language much easier is that you often understand words the first time you hear them, simply because you

have read them in a book, or because you know the building blocks (i.e. kanji) of that word. Whereas, for example, many Japanese students of English can't catch the meaning of a word in a conversation, even though they would be able to understand it if they saw it written down. That's because English is pronounced so differently than it is written. Aside from crazy "rules" about phonetic spelling, we also have liaisons (word linking), meaning through stress, and countless accents and dialects.

*It's easy to find language partners.*

*- Me, speaking from experience*

Since so many Japanese people want to learn English (and are struggling with it), it's extremely easy to find enthusiastic language exchange partners. In other words, it's extremely easy to practice using Japanese in a casual setting, even if you don't live in Japan.

I'll talk more about language partners [towards the end of Phase #1](#).

### Things That Will Always Be Difficult in Japanese

Okay, so I've listed a lot of reasons that I think Japanese is not at all impossible to tackle. However, it would be dishonest of me to say that there's nothing difficult about Japanese as a language. In particular, there is one thing that I still have a problem with even today:

*Natural Japanese phrasing is very difficult to acquire.*

Allow me to quote the illustrious [Tae Kim](#) (who is awesome, by the way):

***"You should always keep in mind that if you don't know how to say it already, then you don't know how to say it."***

*– [Tae Kim's Japanese Grammar Guide](#)*

English and Japanese are fundamentally different. I'm really good at Japanese now, but a good portion of my brain is still functioning in English—the part that's writing these sentences right now, the part that wanted to say "piece of cake" to my girlfriend while we were talking this morning. But I can't say that. I mean, yeah, I can literally say "piece of

cake” in Japanese, and I can say “it’s really easy” in Japanese, but what I want to say is “piece of cake,” as an idiom, in Japanese. But that would be wrong.

This is good news, though, because it’s an opportunity to learn some fun, new Japanese. To continue Tae Kim’s quote:

**“...if you can, ask someone how to say it in Japanese including a full explanation of the answer and start practicing from Japanese.”**

If I do that, I might learn the phrase ちょちょいのちょい / *cho-choi-no-choi*, which, aside from meaning “a piece of cake; a walk in the park,” is also super fun to say.

*Cho-choi-no-choi!* Or maybe I’d learn the phrase 朝飯前 / *asa meshi mae*, which literally means “before breakfast,” but is an idiom in Japanese for “really easy.”

I think it helps to look at this backwards. Japanese people have a really hard time speaking English for the same reason.

For example, let’s say that I’m at a restaurant with my Japanese friend, and we’re both looking at the menu, trying to decide what we want to eat.

My Japanese friend, when ready to order, might say, “I decided.”

But that’s a bit strange in English, isn’t it? It would be more natural to say “I’m ready (to order).” Or we could even say “I’ve decided” or “I know what I want.”

The reason my Japanese friend says “I decided” is because, in Japanese, he would say 決めた / *kimeta*, which means, literally, “I decided.”

Conversely, if I said [注文する]準備が出来た / *chuumon suru junbi ga*

*dekita*, literally, “I am prepared to order,” or *何食べたいかわかる* / *nani tabetai ka wakaru*, literally, “I know what I want to eat,” then my Japanese would sound **very strange**. We cannot directly translate English into Japanese like this, because the words we say are different from the start.

Multiply this by virtually every situation in life and, yeah, mastering natural phrasing in Japanese is going to take quite a bit of time. I think that it’s probably the most difficult aspect of this (or any) language, especially once you get to a higher level.

However, **this does not mean that Japanese is hard to learn**. It just means that it is hard to reach a level where you can speak like a native Japanese person, where you can phrase sentences naturally and effortlessly—something that will happen naturally over time, given that you’ve set up a Japanese learning environment conducive to improvement (e.g. followed this guide, created your own system, etc.).

### [How long does it take to learn Japanese?](#)

When it comes to the world of language learning, there are two things that I seriously hate:

1. The question, “How long does it take to learn [language]?”
2. The word “fluent.”

Okay, maybe “hate” is kind of a strong word. I should say “two *meaningless topics* that surface again and again when talking about languages.”

For this one, I’ll take a quote from Benny at [FluentIn3Months](#) (who I’ll talk about later in the “Speaking Prep” section):

*To me the question and answer ‘How long does it take to learn a language?’ ‘X months/years/lifetimes’ is ludicrous, as it leaves far too much undefined and only caters to lazy one-size-fits-all mentalities, which is something I personally detest about many major expensive language learning courses.*

– [Benny Lewis, FluentIn3Months](#)

I used to ask these questions all of the time.

- How long will it take me to learn the kanji?
- How long will it take me to be fluent in Japanese?
- How long will it take me to become a translator?

But every time that I was asking these questions, it's because I was feeling impatient. Aside from the obvious truth that when learning a language, one size does not fit all, the time it will take is irrelevant.

**People who learn a language are people that commit to learning a language.** So, every time I plan to start a new language, I ask myself the following question:

***“Are you prepared to study and use this language (somewhat) regularly for the rest of your life?”***

And if my answer to that question is no, then I need to seriously reconsider if I should spend time and money trying to learn this new language. Because, logically speaking, it does not make sense to start learning a language if you're going to stop using it one day. Even if you managed to completely master a language in a few months (which is also a ludicrous concept), it would be largely meaningless if later in life you let that knowledge fade away from misuse.

I remember a long time ago, I was reading a blog somewhere. I can't remember where I saw it, but there was a quote that really stuck with me:

***“100% is easy. 99% is exhausting.”***

If you're only 99% committed to doing something, then every time you do it, you have to *decide to* do it. That is, you have to expend willpower to make it happen.

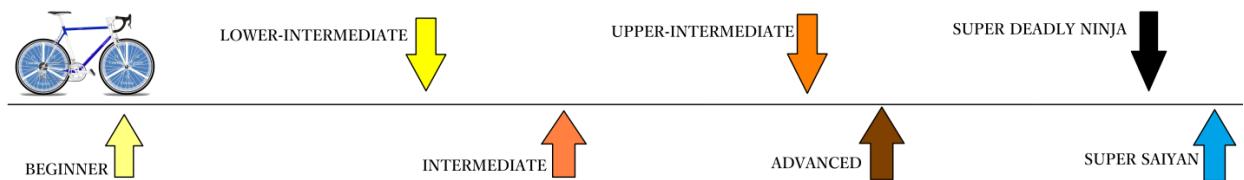
For example, let's say that I have a serious Frappuccino problem. I drink them way too often, and they're making me gain weight. So, I decide that I should avoid Frappuccino. Well, I have two avoidance options, a 99% option and a 100% option:

- 99% - I have decided that I will almost never drink Frappuccino. But every time I drive by my favorite coffee shop, I have to make a conscious decision to not go in and buy a *delicious, sweet Frappuccino. Just this once. I can go to the gym tomorrow. I haven't had one for almost a week. It's not a big deal if I have one now. But then, I really shouldn't, because I haven't been exercising lately, and I still haven't lost any weight at all, and I'm really out of shape. But I really, really want one. Just this once. I can eat less for dinner. But then, I always say that, and then I still end up eating a big dinner. Okay, no. No. No Frappuccino today.*
- 100% - *Hey look, my favorite coffee shop. I'd really love a Frappuccino. But, well, I don't drink Frappuccino.*

100% is a rule. There's no negotiation involved. There's no willpower involved. That's just the way it is.

99% is a constant struggle. I'm always fighting, because I always have the option to [do X] or [not do X].

So, when I study a language, I go 100%. I have my wheel, and I will keep turning it forever.



I know that if I keep riding the bike, I will hit all of those points. It's so relaxing to not worry about when. I will just keep pedaling, enjoy the scenery around me, and then, boom! Super Deadly Ninja Status.

If you really, really, really want to guess how long it will take, though, then we can estimate... but, we have to estimate in hours, not years.

Even the best estimates of how long it takes to learn a language will never be anything more than just that—estimates. No one really knows how long it will take, and the hours required will be different on a person-to-person basis. That said, guessing that you study effectively (e.g. using this guide), then it is possible to make some educated guesses.

For this one, I'm going to defer to a really great post on [JapaneseLevelUp.com](http://JapaneseLevelUp.com) (JALUP), which I mention from time to time in this guide. JALUP also has a really interesting system for studying Japanese. I'd say it's probably my #2 favorite (Guess what my #1 is). Anyways, here are the goods: "[How long does it take to learn Japanese?](#)"

Like I said, “fluent” is vague and largely meaningless. And counting hours is, largely, a waste of time. Although, yeah, it's still fun to do.

### *Is Studying Japanese Worth It?*



Is studying Japanese worth it?

In the years that I've studied Japanese, I can't count the number of times that I've thought this to myself.

Sometimes, the question took different forms. *Can I really learn Japanese?*  
*Will I ever really learn Japanese?*

It doesn't help that if you look these things up on Google, you find websites, comments, etc. that basically tell you, *No, it's not worth it. Spend your time learning four Latin languages rather than just Japanese. Spend your time learning computer programming. Spend your time doing something practical.*

Personally, I disagree. However, the basis for my disagreement is far from practical.

### *Why I Think Studying Japanese Was Worth It*

Studying Japanese, I was able to:

- Learn well over 2,000 Kanji characters in under 100 days (after failing and starting over about 47 times).
- Learn well over 10,000 vocabulary words.
- Learn and comfortably use what is purported to be an incredibly difficult grammar set.
- Reach a level of comprehension where I understand almost all of the Japanese I hear on TV, with friends, at work, etc. (there are exceptions for this—unfamiliar, specialized topics; some dialects; dated Japanese).
- Meet the girl of my dreams. If I did not speak Japanese, I never could have met my **girlfriend** fiancé!
- Meet so many interesting, fantastic people.

But talking strictly from a language-learning perspective, this is why learning Japanese was “worth it” for me: **I managed to do something that I never dreamed I would be able to do.**

It has given me confidence. And maybe confidence is not a measurable benefit, but it does make me a happier person in general.

It has helped me realize that *doing what you love is always more important than doing what you’re supposed to do*. Well, 99% of the time, yeah? In the (roughly) 7 years that I’ve studied Japanese (I quit and restarted in that time span a few times, too), I could have reached a comparable level of fluency in *at least* three or four European languages. **But I don’t love European languages. I love Japanese.** So that’s what I studied. Because it’s pretty rare to regret giving time to the people and things that we truly love.

### [Thinking About Why You’re Studying Japanese](#)

If you find yourself asking that question, “Is studying Japanese worth it?” then maybe you should take a step back and ask yourself two other questions, instead:

- 1) **Why am I wondering if it’s worth it?** For me, every time I wondered this, it was just because I was afraid. I was afraid that I couldn’t do it. I was afraid that I wasn’t good enough. If fear is the reason you’re asking yourself this question, then don’t quit studying. *You can do it. You are good enough.*

2) **Why do I want to learn Japanese?** If you want to learn Japanese for practical reasons, then you should quit now. Yes, there are many practical applications of Japanese. There are jobs, promotions, etc. I have gotten jobs because of my Japanese ability. Still, based on the required time-commitment, I don't think that studying Japanese is worth it from a practical perspective. If you want to learn Japanese because you love the language, because you love the culture, Tokyo, anime, manga—whatever—then you should not quit. Because doing things you love will make you happy. Ultimately, though, it's your decision.

### *Dealing with Disappointments*



Doing anything great means failing again and again. You will probably fail to stick to studying Japanese. I know I did. And maybe you're expecting me to say, but get up! Push through. Fight-O. Or some other bullshit about being disciplined. Personally, that kind of stuff just makes me want to quit more. I don't think that life should be a struggle. And **studying shouldn't be a struggle**, either.

When dealing with disappointments, failures, setbacks, I don't want to have to turn into some sort of superhuman life coach. Instead, I'd rather take a step back, reflect on my expectations, why they were wrong, and search for a pleasant way I can change that in the future.

I want to share a really great article with you. It's by Leo Babauta, from [Zen Habits](#). For me, he's by far the best when it comes to motivation, discipline, habits, and all that good stuff. Here you are, homies...

## *What I Do When I Fail*

By Leo Babauta

I fail at things much more than you might imagine, given that I've written books on forming habits and being content with yourself and being a minimalist and more.

I fail at all of that stuff, and it feels just as horrible for me as it does for anyone else.

I get down on myself, feel guilty, try to avoid thinking about it, would rather hide it from everyone else.

Failing at things can really suck.

And yet, I get back up and try again.

I fail at eating healthy on a regular basis, but I keep trying again. I'm pretty good these days at sticking to an exercise plan, but I failed and tried again, regularly, for years and years.

I've made several attempts at writing the book I'm writing now, and scrapped it all each time because it didn't feel right. And yet, I started again, and I'm almost done now.

I fail at loving myself. But I don't give up on that.

I fail at being a good dad, seemingly multiple times a day. But I continue to try, and sometimes I succeed.

When I try over and over again, once in a while I succeed.

So what's the secret? Well, there isn't any. You just have to keep trying.

That said, here's what I've found to work:

1. **I learned a more flexible mindset.** When you are rigidly trying to stick to a plan or achieve a goal, and things don't go according to plan, then you feel like crap and things can get derailed. But if you have a more flexible mindset, and think, "I might not be able to go according to plan but that's OK because things change," then it's not a disaster when you get off track. There's no single track that you have to stay on.
2. **I came to realize that every attempt is about learning.** When you fail, that's actually really good information. Before you failed, you thought that something would work (a prediction), but then real-world information came in that told you it didn't work. That means you now know something you didn't know before. That's excellent. Now you can adjust your plan, figure something new out, try a new method. Keep learning.
3. **I ask for help.** When I'm struggling with something, I know that I can either give up, or I can figure out a better way. But it's not always easier to figure out a better way, so I reach out to my wife, friends, trusted family members, and I ask them. They might give me simple, obvious, why-didn't-I-see-that advice that I need, or brilliant tips, or accountability. Whatever happens, my friends and loved ones never seem to fail me.
4. **I give myself a break.** If I'm struggling, sometimes my mind or body just needs a break from the discipline. So I'll take a day or two off, or a week, or even more. There's no set time that's right for every situation, so I've been learning to go by feel. For some things, I've taken a month or two off from trying to learn something.
5. **I remind myself why it's important.** It's easy to give up on something, because not doing it is always easier. But giving up means you're losing something important, like helping someone, and so if my reasons for doing something aren't just selfish (pleasure, vanity), then I will renew my vigor for the struggle. This alone is often enough to get me going again, especially if I'm doing it to help someone important, like my kids.

I realize that I'm far from perfect, and that the guilty secrets I hide inside myself are no

different than anyone else's. You guys are just like me, in the inside, and while we all share the commonality of failing to live up to our better nature, we also share the bond of being able to start again.

So start again.

✧ [What I Do When I Fail, ZenHabits.com](#)

So, uh, yeah. You might fail a few times at attaining awesome Japanese Deadly Ninja Super Saiyan status. But that's okay. Don't sweat those failures.

You got this.

Also, check out these other relevant, awesome articles by Leo Babauta:

- [What Really Motivates Us to Stick to a Project?](#)
- [When You're Feeling Self-Doubt & a Lack of Motivation](#)
- [10 Ways to Do What You Don't Want to Do](#)
- [The Lies Your Mind Tells You to Prevent Life Changes](#)
- [7 Discipline-Mastering Practices](#)

*Don't Be Active, Be Productive*

Let me know if you've ever had an experience like this:

First, **you notice a problem, a goal, something you want to change.** Maybe you want to lose weight. Maybe you want to get a six-pack. Maybe you want to save money for a trip to Madagascar! Yay!

...Or maybe you want to learn a language.

But it's so hard to save money and lose weight and learn languages.

**So, you start making a plan.**

If I study French 5 hours a day for one year, that's like 1,800 hours of language study. I'll be so fluent!

If I cut 350 calories per day, then I'll lose 1 pound every ten days, which means I'll lose 10 pounds in ten weeks. Awesome!

If I save \$10 per day, that's \$3,650 a year. Madagascar here I come!

There's only one problem with all of this:

**Thinking about doing something is not the same as doing something.**

- Thinking about studying French is not the same as learning French.
- Thinking about losing weight is not losing weight.
- Thinking about saving money is not saving money.

Don't get me wrong—I think having a plan is a good thing. This entire guide is a giant plan, in many ways.

But plans have their limits. And us humans like imagining that we're going to accomplish things, because [it triggers the same sense of accomplishment](#) as if we'd actually done something. Also, fantasizing too much about positive outcomes [is scientifically shown](#) to have a negative effect on the actual realization of goals.

Most of this guide isn't teaching you a new language. I think I'm sharing some truly valuable information with you, but a guide like this one can only help you so much.

So, yeah. *Act* on the information being presented to you. Download an audio lesson. Buy a grammar book. Schedule a lesson. Whatever. Just starting putting this new language in your brain from Day 1. I will show you how.

**Activity < Productivity.** Always, always, always.

*Developing Study Habits*

Study habits! Okay, so I am very close to saying that this is the most important section of this entire book. I mean, the most popular section is definitely the kanji study guide. But I think study habits are more important, because...

**If you learn to change and manage your habits, you can do *anything*.**

And you can do anything without burning yourself out.

Allow me to give you a glimpse into a few of my study habits (I have a lot). Before I start, I should say that (1) I don't stick to habits 100%, because I'm not perfect. Sometimes I get lazy, or busy, or hungover. Meh. But! I do stick to my study habits long-term. Also, (2) my habits are always evolving, but they usually change into slightly varying habits with the same target effect. Here are some examples...

#### **Study Habit #1 – Morning Flashcard Extravaganza**

For nearly 3 years now, I have done the same thing almost every single morning—I wake up, and I study my Anki flashcards for Japanese. (I'll talk about Anki later). Sure, I missed some days, but I'm pretty confident in saying that I've studied my flashcards over 99% of the days that make up these last three years.

This is a small, simple habit. But it has had such huge, incredible results. Just to give you a rough idea, at the time of this writing my (digital) flashcard deck has 21,035 cards. In other words, I've memorized somewhere around **20,000 Japanese words**. And all I'm doing is waking up in the morning, having a coffee, and studying some flashcards.

When I used to live in California, every morning I went to my favorite coffee shop, had a coffee and a bagel, studied my flashcards, then went to work.

When I lived in Tokyo, every morning I used to go to the convenience store down the street from my house, buy some mixed nuts and a cold canned coffee, then go back home and do my flashcards.

Right now (living in Sapporo) I follow the same morning flashcard routine that I used when I lived in Bangkok (Fall 2014): usually I study my flashcards in bed every morning before I get up. Sometimes I do them after getting up and having a coffee.

In a little bit, I'll explain how I formed these habits. Because these are things that you can consciously change. For now, though, the point I want to stress is: **I formed a habit, and**

**I got *thousands* of vocab words out of it.**

#### [Study Habit #2 – Long Walks in Tokyo](#)

I love walking. It's kind of embarrassing, actually, because my last name is Walker. But, well, it fits. Anyways, yeah, I love walking. But what I *really, really, really* love is walking in Tokyo. There are two reasons for this: (1) I never run out of new things to see and (2) it's safe enough to wear headphones while walking, unlike some other places I've lived around the world.

So, I got into this habit when I lived in Tokyo. Whenever I had a few hours of free time, I started going for walks. I walked all over that city. Shinjuku to Roppongi. Shimokitazawa all the way to Odaiba! Chofu to Shinjuku. I walked for miles and miles.

But walking that far takes a lot of time. Specifically, it takes up a lot of low quality time. So, I started listening to audio lessons from [JapanesePod101](#) every time I went for a walk.

I already listened to these (awesome) lessons from time to time when I went running, but usually it was hard for me to concentrate while exercising.

Walking was different, though. I was taking it easy. I wasn't out of breath. I could concentrate... more than 20% of the time. So I made an effort to listen to these lessons every time I went walking and, as luck (actually, science) would have it, after a while it felt totally natural to put on my audio lessons as I set off on a walk. Or, I should say, it felt unnatural to go for a long walk and NOT listen to lessons.

With this small tweak to something that I loved, I was able to form a study habit that resulted in me listening to hundreds of hours of Japanese audio lessons from [JapanesePod101](#).

### What's Low Quality Time?

I'm actually taking the term "low quality time" from the (very awesome) site [HackingChinese.com](http://HackingChinese.com), which writes:

*"Low quality time is time when you can study, but only in a limited manner. A good example would be time when you drive your car to work. You could listen to something while doing this, but you can't practise writing characters. This is one kind of low quality time. Another example would be time you spend alone, but away from your computer and phone so you can't listen to Chinese or look up things on the internet. This is another kind of low quality time. Using this approach, every second of the day can be considered to be study time of different qualities, albeit sometimes so low that it's impossible to use for studying."*

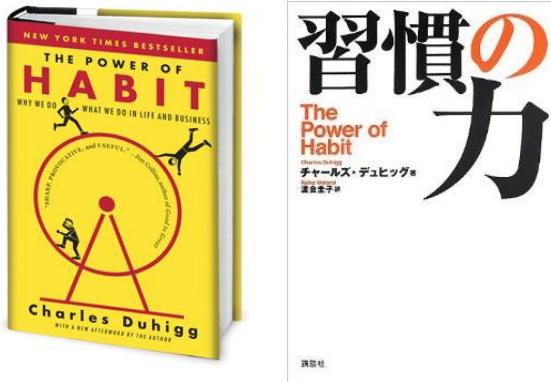
- "["Time quality: Studying the right thing at the right time," HackingChinese.com](#)

### Understanding the Nature of Habits

Most of my initial study habits were formed from dumb luck—me gluing Japanese to some other thing that I loved and did all of the time. But later, I finally started taking a closer look at the nature of habits, and the fascinating research into all those things we do without thinking.

One of the first nonfiction books that I ever read in Japanese is [The Power of Habit](#), by

Charles Duhigg. The Japanese version is called 『習慣の力』 (shuukan no chikara), which is pretty much a direct translation. It's a pretty famous book, so maybe you've read it before.



In my opinion, this is one of the best books that a person can read as they prepare to learn a foreign language, as changing habits is the easiest way to stick to a long-term study plan without burning out.

Duhigg's site explains it as follows:

*At its core, The Power of Habit contains an exhilarating argument: The key to exercising regularly, losing weight, raising exceptional children, becoming more productive, building revolutionary companies and social movements, and achieving success is understanding how habits work.*

*Habits aren't destiny. As Charles Duhigg shows, by harnessing this new science, we can transform our businesses, our communities, and our lives.*

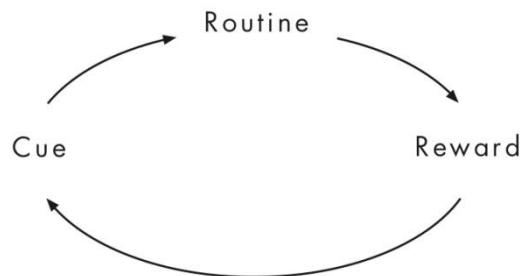
### *Another (Reportedly) Awesome Book on Habits*

I recently learned about another book called [Superhuman by Habit: A Guide to Becoming the Best Possible Version of Yourself, One Tiny Habit at a Time](#), by Tynan.



I haven't read it yet, but I have heard many say that it's even better than [The Power of Habit](#). I'd love to hear from anyone that gets a chance to read it.

Habits make up for about 40% of all that we do (apparently), and according to some fancy MIT researchers, there is a simple neurological loop at the core of every habit, a loop that consists of three parts: A cue, a routine and a reward.



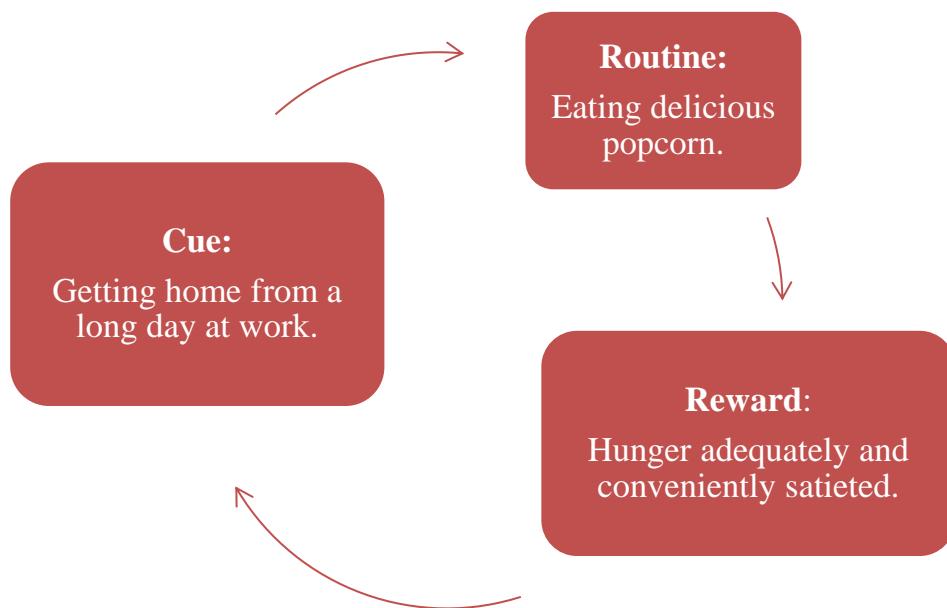
One of the simpler examples of this is brushing your teeth. Sometimes your mouth feels icky (CUE), so then you brush your teeth (ROUTINE), and at the end you feel sparkly fresh (REWARD), so you end up repeating the action again... in other words, it becomes a habit.

But that's a highly simplified example. Sometimes it's not that easy to tell what's going on inside of our ridiculous heads.

I'll give a (somewhat embarrassing) example from my personal life. About a year ago, I was living in Tokyo, working as an English teacher at a conversation school. Since I was teaching mostly adults, I usually worked nights. My lunch break was around 4:30pm. Too

early for dinner, too late for lunch. So I would usually only eat something pretty small. Then I'd finish work around 10pm, and by the time I got home, it was usually around 11pm. Too late to cook anything. But I also didn't want to eat a big meal. But I also wanted to eat *something*.

Well, I fell into the horrible—and yet, wonderful—habit of eating Butter Soy Sauce Popcorn from the convenience store like three nights a week. Yikes.



It's kind of cool knowing that these habits find their way into almost every aspect of our lives, but the truly awesome part of this is that habits are malleable. With a little bit of effort, they can be changed.

### How to Change Your Habits

You might think that I'm losing track a bit, but I promise that being able to change habits is most definitely relevant to learning Japanese.

*"Change might not be fast and it isn't always easy.  
But with time and effort, almost any habit can be  
reshaped."*

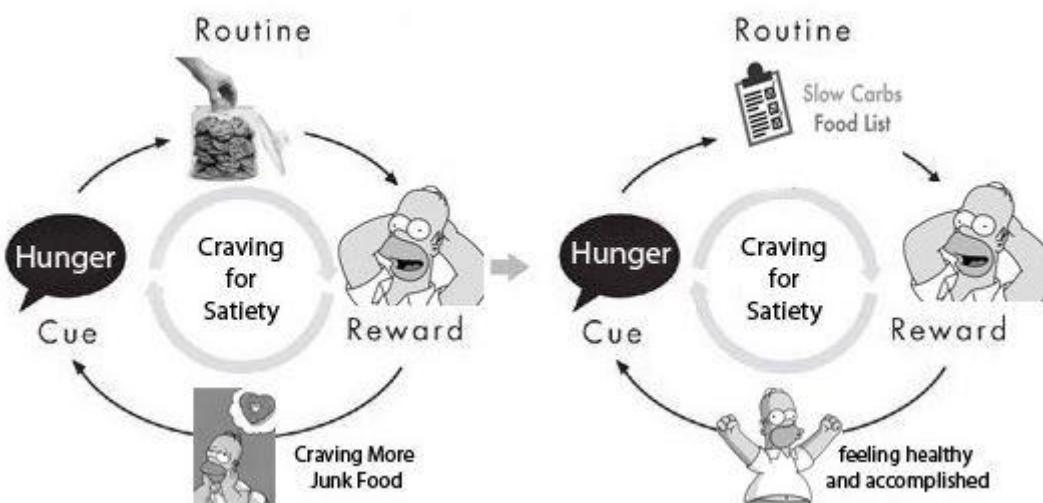
— Charles Duhigg, [The Power of Habit: Why We Do](#)

## What We Do in Life and Business

This is a very simplified explanation. For a detailed look on how to change habits, please either read [The Power of Habit](#) or check out [this awesome flowchart](#).

The basic explanation for how to change a habit is to keep the Cue and the Reward, but change the Routine.

For example, if you're trying to stop eating junk food, it might look like this:



Or for my popcorn addiction, maybe I could start eating fruit or something—I don't know. I never tried to quit, honestly.

Okay, that's great. People can change habits. Awesome.

But the real question is: **How can I use this for learning Japanese?**

Why, I thought you'd never ask...

### Habit Tagging—How to Develop Study Habits for Japanese

I think that changing habits is really, really hard. Most of the time people talk about changing habits, they're trying to stop eating delicious food or quit drinking or something.

But we're not trying to get rid of a bad habit; we're trying to gain a good habit. And I think creating a new, good habit is much easier than changing an old, bad habit.

I have a very complex system for doing this:

1. Pick a habit that you already have.
2. Link it with Japanese.

Yeah, I was joking. It's not complex at all. It's really simple, and it's something that I like to call it habit tagging... but that's just a phrase I made up.

**“Habit tagging” refers to taking a deeply ingrained habit that you already have and sticking a new, awesome routine on top of it.**

For example, for about three years now, I've been studying Japanese every morning right after waking up. I used to think that the cue for this habit was waking up, but after reading *The Power of Habit*, I realized that the real cue was my deeply ingrained—and deeply enjoyed—habit of having a coffee every morning.

I took something that I really loved (my morning coffee), and I made a rule that I had to study my Japanese flashcards every time I did that thing. This is the same thing that I did when I started listening to [JapanesePod101](#) lessons every time I went for a walk in Tokyo.

#### Established Habit That I Enjoy

**Cue** = Having free time.

**Routine** = Going for a long walk.

**Reward** = Feeling healthy and adventurous and seeing lots of cool things.

#### Enjoyable Habit Version 2.0

**Cue** = Having free time.

**Routine** = Going for a long walk *and listening to Japanese lessons*.

**Reward** = Feeling healthy and adventurous and seeing lots of cool things *and learning*.

### *Study Habit Assignment*

So, in Phase #2, I'm going to talk about a daily study routine. You don't need to worry about it yet, but as a little bit of preparation I recommend the following:

1. Write down a list of your deeply ingrained, enjoyable habits.
2. Put stars by the ones that you do every day.

That's pretty much all I have to say about habits for the time being. Check out these articles if you want some more whatnot on habits and advice from habit sage gurus:

- [Zen Habits - The Smart Way to Stick to Habits](#)
- [Zen Habits - The Habit Change Cheatsheet: 29 Ways to Successfully Ingrain a Behavior](#)
- [Zen Habits - 36 Lessons I've Learned About Habits](#)
- [Zen Habits - Habits: A Simple Change in Mindset Changes Everything](#)
- [Zen Habits - It's Not Too Late to Change Your Habits](#)
- [PsychCentral - The Golden Rule of Habit Change](#)
- [James Clear - The 3 R's of Habit Change: How To Start New Habits That Actually Stick](#)

### *Avoid Using Willpower*

Earlier when I talked about how committing 100% is easier than committing 99%, what I was really talking about is the conservation of willpower.

Whenever possible, we want to avoid using willpower, because it will drain us. Most importantly, **constantly relying on willpower and effort to study Japanese will set you up for failure.**

I'll let the experts explain. Here is a quote from an article by [James Clear](#)...

### *The Willpower Muscle*

Decades of research have discovered that willpower is not something you have or don't have, but rather it is a resource that can be used up and restored. Like tired muscles at the end of a workout, your willpower can become depleted if you use it too much. Much of this research is explained in excellent books like [The Willpower Instinct by Kelly McGonigal](#) and [Willpower by Roy Baumeister and John Tierney](#).

A classic example can be found by looking at college students. During finals week, students use all of their willpower to study and everything else collapses as a result. People eat whatever they can find, students who haven't smoked all semester start lighting up outside the library, and many people can't even muster the strength to change out of their sweatpants. There is only so much willpower to go around.

We don't typically think about willpower and motivation as a finite resource that is impacted by all of the things we do throughout the day, but that's exactly how it works.

- James Clear, "[How to Stick With Good Habits Even When Your Willpower is Gone](#)"

I don't really have explicit advice on how to avoid willpower. Rather, the conservation of willpower is one of the underlying principles of a number of topics that I bring up in this guide (notably, [study habits](#), which we just looked at and removing barriers, which I talk about [in Phase #3](#)).

### *Accountability Systems*

There is a lot of evidence out there proving that accountability systems work, especially when it comes to changing routine behavior such as exercising, dieting, and studying.

For those that don't know, an accountability system is basically just a situation (that you create), which pressures to you come through on promised actions. For example, say you and your friend make a pact that you're going to go to the gym every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning. Then, you decide that after leaving the gym every day, you'll both take home each other's gym shoes (or bag or whatever). So your gym shoes stay at your friend's house. And your friend's gym shoes stay at your house. Then, Monday morning comes around, and you really, really, really don't feel like going to the

gym. But if you don't go to the gym, then your friend won't have any gym shoes when he/she gets there later this morning. So you have no choice but to go. Your friend is counting on you. You've created an accountability system.

There's evidence that these work, so it makes sense that so many sites, books, and experts push accountability systems.

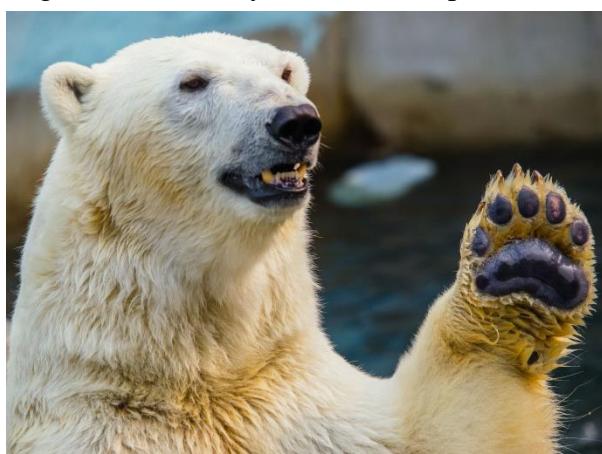
But, honestly, I don't do accountability systems. I've never even tried to, because I rarely tell someone when I set a goal for myself. For me, goals have always been very personal, and they're not the type of thing that I like sharing with people. In fact, I've found that when I share my goals with people, I lose my motivation to complete them.

I'm not alone in this. In fact, there's a rather [popular TED Talk](#) that explains (scientifically) why not keeping your goals to yourself can have negative consequences. At the end of that video, he mentions a way that it is okay to discuss one's goals, but, rather than get into that, I'll just leave some links for accountability systems. I don't really have any business giving advice that I don't practice, right?

- [Entrepreneur: Why an Accountability Buddy Is Your Secret Weapon for Faster Growth](#)
- [FluentIn3Months: Forget “Learning a Language.” Focus on Forming the Habit](#)
- [zen habits: The Biggest Reasons You Haven’t Changed Your Habits](#)

### **Mindset Prep: Complete!**

High fives for everyone. (Or, in Japanese, ハイタッチ / hai tacchi / “high touch!”)



## Phase #1 Progress:

- ✓ Mindset Prep
- Vocab Prep
- Listening Prep
- Reference Prep
- Grammar Prep
- Speaking Prep

## Vocab Prep

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# 語彙力

Before I delve into the Vocab Prep section, I'd like to take a short detour so that we can talk about the Japanese Writing System and its proper pronunciation.

### *The Pronunciation and Writing of Japanese*

I had a hard time deciding which section of this book I would use to introduce the Japanese writing system. After a lot of thought, though, I think that it is most appropriate to familiarize absolute beginners with it as soon as possible.

### *How to Pronounce Japanese*

I'm not sure if you remember, but [here in the Mindset Prep section](#) I talked about how Japanese has a shallow orthographic depth (i.e. is written similarly to how it's pronounced). This is awesome, because it means that reading skills boost listening skills.

Well, there is even more awesome news: If you're a native speaker of English, then **Japanese is ridiculously easy to pronounce**. It is one of the easiest foreign languages to pronounce for monolingual native English speakers. Allow me to explain:

<i>English &amp; Japanese Phonology</i>	
<b>English</b>	<b>Japanese</b>
Has many sounds.	Has few sounds.
Has around 19 vowel sounds (depending where you're from).	Has 5 vowel sounds (all of which exist in English)
Has many diphthongs (phonemes with multiple sounds; e.g., "oi" in "foil").	Has no diphthongs. 1 syllable = 1 phoneme. Yay!
Has a deep orthography.	Has a shallow orthography.

So (1) You should feel bad for Japanese people studying English, and (2) You should feel grateful that we have it so easy.

The easiest way to sum up the sounds of Japanese is this:

- ❖ All consonants are hard consonants. (Note: The term “hard consonant” is technically inaccurate, but I thought that talking about “stops” and “fricatives” and all that fun stuff would be boring.) What I mean by “hard consonant” is the following. If we have “g,” then the sound we want is the “g” in “game” or “garden” or “go.” It is not the “g” sound in “gem,” “gene,” or “gym.” Likewise, the “c” in “cat” or “cake” is a “hard C” whereas the “c” in “race” or “spice” is a “soft c.” Have I confused you enough? If so, please wipe this from your brain and move on.)
- ❖ All vowels are like Spanish vowels. (If you don’t know what vowels sound like in Spanish, no sweat. I’ll explain.)

Here is a complete list of the sounds that make up Japanese:

#### Vowel Sounds

- ❖ a (Like the “ah” in father.)
- ❖ i (Like the “ee” in “feet.”)
- ❖ u (Like the “oo” in “soon.” Note that there is no forward movement of the lips.)
- ❖ e (Like the “e” in “get.”)
- ❖ o (Like the “o” in “old.”)

## Consonant Sounds

- ❖ k, g
- ❖ s, sh, j, z
- ❖ t, ch, ts, d
- ❖ n
- ❖ h/f, b, p
- ❖ y
- ❖ r
- ❖ w

These sounds will always appear as a syllable, and usually that syllable will usually have a vowel at the end.

For example, here is *every single sound* that you can make with in Japanese with the “k” consonant:

- ❖ “k” syllables
  - ka (“kah”)
  - ki (“kee”)
  - ku (“koo”)
  - ke (“keh”)
  - ko (“koh”)

My explanation might be slightly confusing, but just trust me when I say that it will be very easy for you. Later on in Phase #2, we can talk about some of the finer points of Japanese phonology. Really, though, a technical explanation of the sounds of the Japanese language can only take you so far.

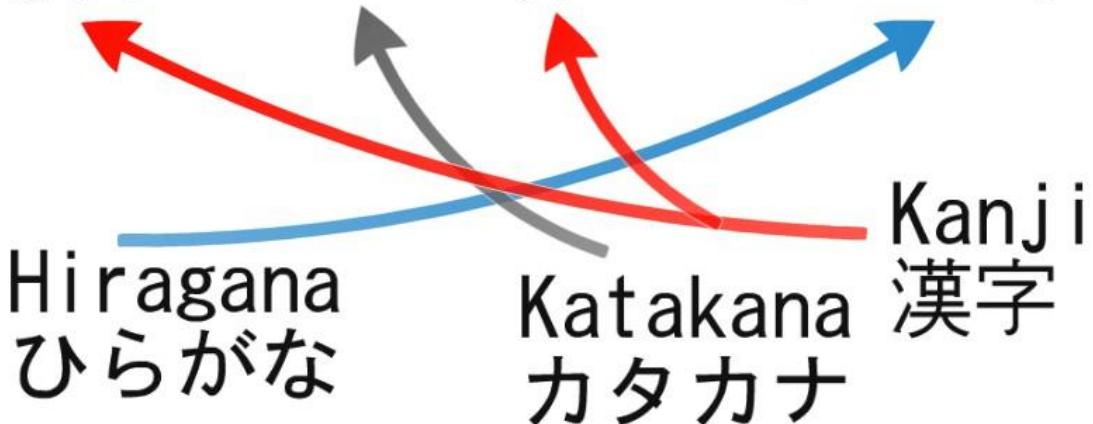
Suffice it to say that Japanese pronunciation is easy enough that you should be able to learn it naturally as you learn Hiragana and Katakana. That is, as you learn your first Japanese characters, which we’ll look at right now!

## *The Three Types of Japanese Characters*

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The Japanese writing system consists of three types of characters: hiragana, katakana, and kanji.

漢字テストは難しかったです。



When I was at a lower level of Japanese, I used to complain about the Japanese writing system all of the time. Yeah, I was fascinated by it. But at the same time I loathed its very existence. It is, after all, the most intimidating aspect of the Japanese language. Looking back, however, it's not all that bad to get through.

There are two ways that you'll see Japanese characters written on a page: (1) horizontally, from left to right, like English and (2) vertically, from top to bottom and from right to left. If you study Japanese in school, there's a good chance they'll have you write horizontally, from left to right.

However, if you read a novel, or any upper-level reading material, chances are that it will be written from top to bottom and from right to left. It sounds difficult, but actually it's not too hard to read like this, thanks to the way Japanese characters are written.

There are three kinds of Japanese characters:

- Kanji (kah-n-jee) 漢字
- Hiragana (hee-rah-gah-nah) ひらがな
- Katakana (kah-tah-kah-nah) カタカナ

All three of them are used together in sentences. It's usually pretty obvious when to use which one. You might hear people sometimes refer to hiragana and katakana as simply 'kana.' Although it will take at least a few months to learn all of the kanji (which I'll talk about extensively in Phase #2), it should only take a few days to learn Hiragana and

Katakana. Yay!

So let's do that first.

### *Hiragana & Katakana*

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These two types of characters are our main concern for now.

Hiragana and Katakana are not hard to learn. They are both used to represent the sound syllables that make up the Japanese language. So, for instance, 'ka' in hiragana / katakana would be **か / カ.**

Each of these syllabaries (alphabets) has 46 basic characters (sounds).

**Hiragana is usually used to represent Japanese words and grammatical elements (e.g. particles), while Katakana is usually used for words of foreign origin.**

So, for example, *sumimasen*, which means "sorry" or "excuse me," would be written in hiragana, because it's a word of Japanese origin: **すみません.**

However, a word like *nekutai*, which means (get this) "necktie," would be written in katakana, because it's a foreign loan word: **ネクタイ.**

Often these loan words will just be English words with a Japanese pronunciation, like the example just shown. The cool thing about this is that **once you learn katakana, you will have learned to read thousands of words in Japanese.** This is why katakana is a great syllabary to learn if you're just going to Japan for a short trip. It will come in handy, I promise. For your perusal, here are the complete lists of both hiragana and katakana characters:

## Hiragana Chart

a column	i column	u column	e column	o column	-ya	-yu	-yo
あ	い	う	え	お			
a	i	u	e	o			
か	き	く	け	こ	きや	きゅ	きょ
ka	ki	ku	ke	ko	kyा	kyু	kyো
さ	し	す	せ	そ	しゃ	শ্যু	শ্যো
sa	shi	su	se	so	sha	shu	sho
た	ち	つ	て	と	ちや	চিযু	চিয়ো
ta	chi	tsu	te	to	cha	chu	cho
な	に	ぬ	ね	の	নিয়া	নিযু	নিয়ো
na	ni	nu	ne	no	nya	nyu	nyo
は	ひ	ふ	へ	ほ	হিয়া	হিযু	হিয়ো
ha	hi	hu	he	ho	hyা	hyু	hyো
ま	み	む	め	も	মিয়া	মিযু	মিয়ো
ma	mi	mu	me	mo	myা	myু	myো
ら	り	る	れ	ろ	রিয়া	রিযু	রিয়ো
ra	ri	ru	re	ro	ryা	ryু	ryো
や				を			ন
ya				wo			
が	ぎ	ぐ	げ	ご	ぎয়া	গিযু	গিয়ো
ga	gi	gu	ge	go	gyা	gyু	gyো
ざ	じ	ず	ぜ	ぞ	জিয়া	জিযু	জিয়ো
za	ji	zu	ze	zo	ja	ju	jo
だ	ぢ	づ	で	ど			
da	di (ji)	du (zu)	de	do			
ば	び	ぶ	べ	ぼ	বিয়া	বিযু	বিয়ো
ba	bi	bu	be	bo	byা	byু	byো
পা	পি	পু	পে	পো	পিয়া	পিযু	পিয়ো
pa	pi	pu	pe	po	pyা	pyু	pyো

(You can also download this chart [from my website](#).)

## Katakana Chart

a column	i column	u column	e column	o column	-ya	-yu	-yo
ア	イ	ウ	エ	オ			
a	i	u	e	o			
カ	キ	ク	ケ	コ	キヤ	キュ	キョ
ka	ki	ku	ke	ko	kyā	kyū	kyō
サ	シ	ス	セ	ソ	シャ	シュ	ショ
sa	shi	su	se	so	sha	shu	sho
タ	チ	ツ	テ	ト	チャ	チュ	チョ
ta	chi	tsu	te	to	cha	chu	cho
ナ	ニ	ヌ	ネ	ノ	ニヤ	ニュ	ニョ
na	ni	nu	ne	no	nya	nyu	nyo
ハ	ヒ	フ	ヘ	ホ	ヒヤ	ヒュ	ヒョ
ha	hi	hu	he	ho	hya	hyu	hyo
マ	ミ	ム	メ	モ	ミヤ	ミュ	ミョ
ma	mi	mu	me	mo	myā	myu	myo
ラ	リ	ル	レ	ロ	リヤ	リュ	リョ
ra	ri	ru	re	ro	ryā	ryu	ryo
ヤ				ヲ			ン
ya				wo			n
<hr/>							
ガ	ギ	グ	ゲ	ゴ	ギャ	ギュ	ギョ
ga	gi	gu	ge	go	gyā	gyu	gyo
ザ	ジ	ズ	ゼ	ゾ	ジャ	ジュ	ジョ
za	ji	zu	ze	zo	ja	ju	jo
ダ	ヂ	ヅ	ヂ	ド			
da	di (ji)	du (zu)	de	do			
バ	ビ	ブ	ベ	ボ	ビヤ	ビュ	ビョ
ba	bi	bu	be	bo	byā	byu	byo
パ	ピ	ブ	ペ	ボ	ピヤ	ピュ	ピョ
pa	pi	pu	pe	po	pyā	pyu	pyo

(You can also download this chart [from my website](#).)

You might notice that a lot of katakana characters look just like hiragana characters, only more rigid.

Maybe those charts seem a bit overwhelming. Honestly, you don't need to worry about it, though, because we have...

### *Ninja Tool #1 – Hiragana & Katakana Apps & Programs*



There are so many apps and programs out there for learning hiragana and katakana. And honestly, I don't really think it matters all that much which ones you use or don't use.

A 5-second search on Google for “best apps for learning hiragana and katakana” brought up [this smartphone app](#) that looks pretty solid:

#### **Hiragana and Katakana – Complete Basics of Japanese**

[View More by This Developer](#)

By [TheJapanesePage.com](#)

Open iTunes to buy and download apps.



[View in iTunes](#)

#### **Description**

This app is ad-supported and completely FREE! You can remove the ads through an in-app purchase, but we have tried to make them as unobtrusive as possible. Thank you!

[Hiragana and Katakana – Complete Basics of Japanese Support](#) [...More](#)

#### **What's New in Version 1.4**

- \* Includes most Retina graphics for iPad 3 (we'll finish it soon)
- \* A fix for ads that show only black boxes
- \* fixes for the spaced repetition to make it more accurate

[...More](#)

 This app is designed for both iPhone and iPad

[...More](#)

Free

## Screenshots

iPhone | iPad



The homework for Ninja Tool #1 is to find an app like this or a program online that will walk you through learning hiragana and katakana. As you learn them, you'll also learn Japanese pronunciation naturally.

いっせきにちよう  
一石二鳥！ /isseki nichou / “Killing two birds with one stone.”

(Literally the same phrase in Japanese: 一 one + 石 stone + 二 two + 鳥 bird.)

A couple of things to be careful for when choosing your hiragana and katakana learning tool:

1. **Do not pay money for this.** It will only take you a few days to learn hiragana and katakana. Maybe a week or two at most. As such, it doesn't make sense to pay for an app, program, or lesson that you'll be deleting a month from now. Companies that are selling packages on how to learn

these characters are ripping you off. It can be done for free.

2. **Make sure that the app or program you choose has audio for each of the characters.** We want to learn pronunciation alongside hiragana and katakana.
3. **Don't worry about studying these until you get to Phase #2.** All you need to do right now is pick an app or program and download it. That's all! (Of course, motivated kids can study ahead of time should they wish to do so.)

#### *What about the other types of characters?*

Maybe you've noticed that I'm not mentioning some other things, namely kanji and Romaji.



The Romanization of Japanese (Romaji) refers to using roman letters to transcribe Japanese sounds. As for Romaji, I'll keep this short and sweet: **If you study Japanese with romaji you are sabotaging yourself.** It's super-detrimental. You must, must, must learn *at least* hiragana and katakana before you study Japanese any longer than a week or so (which is why we will be mastering them right as we dive into Phase #2).

But your real concern probably isn't Romaji. I'm guessing it's kanji, yeah? That crazy difficult one that you've heard so many horror stories about? Yeah, that would be kanji.

To put it bluntly, **don't worry about kanji yet.**

Many will say that learning the kanji is the most difficult aspect of learning Japanese. I used to say this, too. But that was before I actually learned the kanji. Looking back, it wasn't that difficult at all. Yeah, it took a long time, because it's a lot of information, but learning them all is actually pretty straightforward.

Plus, you will have something that I didn't have: Someone walking you through a time-efficient, effective, step-by-step process of learning the kanji. I'll talk about this a little bit more later on in Phase #1 and a lot more in Phase #2.

For the time being, let's keep moving through the Vocab Prep Section.

### *The Importance of Building Vocab*

Vocab is a numbers game.

Remember how earlier in this book I talked about how Japanese has a shallow orthographic depth (i.e., is easy to pronounce)? Well, in my opinion, that is exactly what makes Japanese such a simple language to learn.

If a Japanese person “learns” an English word, then they still probably won’t be able to catch it when they hear a native speaker saying it. There are a lot of reasons for this, but it basically boils down to Japanese people being unable to “hear” English words just by reading them.

But this is not true of (English speakers) studying Japanese. The sounds that make up the Japanese language are simple enough that when you hear a word that you've “learned” in a book before, even if you're only hearing it for the first time, there's a very good chance that you'll be able to catch it and understand its meaning.

Because of this association between writing and sound, we have a situation where **increasing vocabulary actually increases listening comprehension simultaneously**. And if you increase your Japanese listening comprehension to a very advanced level, then you'll be able to understand what's being said on TV shows, anime, and radio broadcasts. In other words, you'll be able to supercharge your passive listening practice by listening to content that you actually enjoy. And that's an incredible springboard to high-level mastery of Japanese.

What I'm trying to say is that vocab is really, really important. And after you've learned the kanj (which I'll talk about later), **vocabulary acquisition should be the main focus of your studies**. The funny thing is that a lot of classes gloss over vocabulary acquisition, because it's not well-suited for group study. Personally, I've always thought that vocab study doesn't get stressed enough in books and blog posts about studying languages.

If you want to understand TV shows and anime, you need to know every word of every sentence they're saying. I know that when I was at a lower level of Japanese, it was really frustrating trying to watch TV or listen to radio shows, because all it took for me to get lost was *one single unknown word*. One word could throw me off entirely.

Now I'm at a much higher level of Japanese, and I can usually manage if an unknown word or two pops up in conversation or in Japanese media. But the main reason that I can cope is that (1) I have a huge vocabulary (for being a non-native speaker) and (2) I have an extensive knowledge of kanji readings, which often gives me the ability to learn a word simply by hearing it for the first time in a given context.

But, yeah, tackling a mountain of vocabulary is really intimidating, right? I remember I used to do searches online for things like "number of words to pass JLPT N1" or "number of words to understand Japanese TV." Looking back now, I think that I was doing those searches for two reasons. First, I didn't feel confident that I'd ever learn Japanese. And second, I was being lazy.

With all of that in mind, for this book I've tried to create a vocab study system that is extremely simple to set up and easy to implement *consistently over a long period of time*.

I'll explain the details of that system in Phase #2, but for now I'd like to help you get set up with

the tools to make it happen. Specifically, we're going to need three ninja tools:

1. Anki Flashcards
2. Remembering the Kanji Study System
3. Reviewing the Kanji

Allow me to elaborate...

### *Ninja Tool #2 – Anki Flashcards*

In my opinion, Anki Flashcards are **the most important language study tool in this entire guide**, and that's why they weave their way into just about every section of this book.

Anki Flashcards are intelligent computer flashcards that adjust according to what you do and do not remember.



The basic idea is that Anki shows you a flashcard right around when you will be forgetting it. This means that (1) you don't waste time studying things you already know and (2) you do spend time studying things you're in danger of forgetting.

So, say you have a flashcard with something you want to remember, like a Japanese word:



With Anki, all you need to do is hit that “Show Answer” button at the bottom, and the answer will show:



Then at the bottom of the next screen, you just tell Anki how easy (or difficult) that word was for you, and it will automagically hide it away from you for the ideal amount of time (in this case, <1 minute for a difficult card, 4 days for an easy card, and <10 minutes for a card that is so-so).

When I first started using Anki, it was quite the undertaking. I was already living in Japan, and I had 1,000+ paper flashcards that I had to transfer over to my newly created Anki flashcard deck. It took forever! I’m so glad I did it, though. I can only imagine how many of those 1,000+ words I would have forgotten had I not put them into my Anki deck. Also, I can only imagine how much time I would have spent reviewing cards that I already had memorized (because they were right next to cards I was good at).

To use Anki, download it onto your computer at this website: [AnkiSRS.net](http://AnkiSRS.net).

**Don’t create a new deck or start studying just yet**, though, as I’ll have detailed

instructions on the best way to do that in Phase #2. You also don't need to worry about installing it on your phone just yet, either, as we'll look at that after we've set up our study decks.

If you have any trouble setting up Anki on your computer, their website has [good documentation and tutorials](#) for pretty much any problem you might be having.

Anki is especially useful, because by using it we can track our vocab progress. You can have a clear understanding of how many vocab words you have memorized, which means that you can track how far along you are in trying to achieve fluency. At the time of this writing, my Anki decks say that **I've memorized just under 22,000 flashcards**. That might seem like a ridiculous number, but I'm not some sort of study shark monster. I simply stuck to a simple system over a long period of time.

To be honest, I don't even add new flashcards all that often anymore, because now I get new vocabulary through high-level, practical study materials such as reading novels, translation work, TV shows and movies, friends, etc.

### *Ninja Tool #3 – Remembering the Kanji*



**Remembering the Kanji 1: A Complete Course on How Not to Forget the Meaning and Writing of Japanese Characters** Paperback – June 1, 2011  
by James W. Heisig (Author)  
4.5 out of 5 stars 90 customer reviews  
ISBN-13: 978-0824835927 | ISBN-10: 0824835921 | Edition: 6th Updated

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For true beginners that don't know, Kanji is the third of the three pillars of the Japanese writing system (the other two being hiragana and katakana, which I talked about earlier). The characters are actually Chinese characters that the Japanese began to adopt well over 1,000 years ago.

# 有言実行

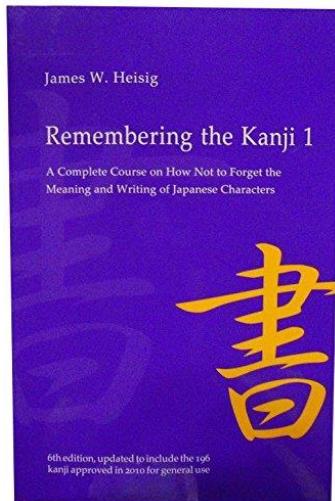
These squiggly characters that look like Chinese madness?

These are kanji. And there are around 2,000 of them that you'll need to learn.

Don't panic. It's not as hard as it sounds. I'll explain how we'll learn these, later. For now, let's just gather some supplies that we'll use when it's time to tackle this disgusting (and, some say, beautiful) beast.

This may cause some uproar with readers, as there's quite a debate going on as to whether one should use *Remembering the Kanji* (which I'm about to recommend) in order to tackle the 2,136 Japanese characters you're required to learn in order to, say, read a newspaper. But, hey, we're all entitled to our opinions.

Our 1-Year Plan integrates James Heisig's timeless book. We don't do it exactly his way, but it is still worthwhile to pick up [his book](#):



[Remembering the Kanji, by James W. Heisig](#)

In the interest of full disclosure, you don't actually need this book in order to follow the steps in this study guide. I mostly recommend the book out of respect for James Heisig, as he has done so much to help aid students in their pursuit of Japanese mastery.

Remembering the Kanji is a kanji-learning system that Heisig developed back in the 70's. Yikes! *In most Japanese classes, you learn kanji by order of usefulness.* The problem with this is that some of the most useful kanji are pretty difficult to memorize. At the same time, some of the less-used kanji are incredibly easy to learn, and they show up as parts of all kinds of different, more commonly used kanji.

**Heisig's method is essentially the polar opposite of what you do in Japanese classes.** He completely disregards (for the time being, at least) the usefulness of the kanji and instead presents them *in an order ideally suited for memorizing their writing and meaning only.* So, you learn how to write the kanji and what it means, but you don't actually know any Japanese words that use that kanji.

He does this by dividing the kanji into primitive elements. Then, he takes all 2,136 kanji that you need to learn to read a Japanese newspaper, and he puts them in order of these primitive elements.

So, for example, 隹 (turkey) + 木 (tree) = 集 (gather).

By the time you get to 集 in Remembering the Kanji, you've already learned the primitive elements 隹 (turkey) and 木 (tree), so it's easy to memorize 集 if you use a mnemonic (for example, a story) to help you remember it. For instance, something like, "I saw a bunch of **turkeys gathered** in the *tree* outside my window."

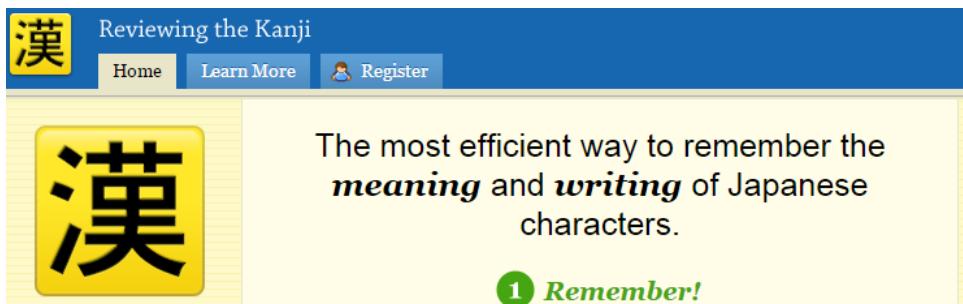
This is a very basic example. In reality, there is a very intricate science to mnemonics (memory devices), making it relatively simple to learn large quantities of information. I'll talk about this a lot in Phase #2.

Also in Phase #2, I'll present a kanji study method that uses Heisig's method, but adds quite a few tweaks so that we can speed it up dramatically.

Don't worry if I've lost you, as I'll explain more later.

For the time being, let's check off *Remembering the Kanji* as Ninja Tool #2 and move on.

### *Ninja Tool #4 – Reviewing the Kanji*



Reviewing the Kanji

Home Learn More Register

The most efficient way to remember the **meaning** and **writing** of Japanese characters.

1 Remember!

Reviewing the Kanji is an amazing website. It is made up of a community of people who are using Heisig's *Remembering the Kanji* system. This website has the potential to save you hundreds of hours learning the kanji.

Again, in Phase #2 I'll discuss what I think is the best way to utilize this site in conjunction with your *Remembering the Kanji* book and Anki Flashcards. For now, though, just bookmark the following address: <http://kanji.koohii.com/>.

That bookmark is Ninja Tool #3. And with it, the “Vocab Prep” section of Phase #1 is complete. That was easy, yeah? Okay, moving on...

### Phase #1 Progress:

- ✓ Mindset Prep
- ✓ Vocab Prep
- Listening Prep
- Reference Prep
- Grammar Prep
- Speaking Prep

## Listening Prep



I call this ‘listening prep,’ but maybe what it should be called is ‘Nihongo Saturation.’

I’m always a little bit shocked by the results of listening practice when studying foreign languages. Maybe because it’s such a passive method of study—I’m not going after books and new concepts and writing notes and examples. Instead, I’m just receiving instruction, honing my ear for Japanese—maybe that’s why I’m always shocked at just how helpful listening practice is when learning a foreign language.

It really works though... if you really commit to it.

What I mean is, if you want to have listening practice improve your Japanese, then you need to Nihongo-ify your life. This can be very difficult to do, because it might mean cutting back on music, cutting back on TV.

I hate to say it, but it takes a bit of sacrifice. We’re trying to do something monumental here, after all. And, like most worthwhile achievements, it’s only possible with a little bit of sacrifice.

I have, for your perusal, a video & a playlist. I hope that it can give you a little boost when you’re feeling less motivated:

How bad do you want it?

<http://youtu.be/lsSC2vx7zFQ>

Motivation Playlist

<http://8tracks.com/gflores121/no-pain-no-gain>

If you're anything like I was before I knew Japanese, then every day is tinged with a little bit of frustration, frustration that you don't have this seemingly impossible thing: Japanese fluency.

**But if you move towards the achievement of that goal every day, it can allay that frustration.** I bring this up now, because listening practice can be incredibly inconvenient. We like listening to music. We like watching shows. And it is *hard* to deprive yourself of the easy path.

I write a lot about habits. I write a lot about limiting the expense of willpower, limiting struggle. But there *is* work involved in this. When you reach that level that you're striving for, you will tell people *I worked for this*. It won't be thanks to me, or some book, or some course, or some teacher. It will be because of *you*.

If I'm going to be honest, when I was at a low level of Japanese, I resented people that were better than me. **I was jealous.** I wanted what they had. I couldn't accept that they were *so much* better than me. But then, once I got to that level, once I passed (some of) those people, my perspective changed quite a bit. And the reason is that I stopped resenting people better than me, and, instead, I started respecting them. **They deserved what they had, because they had worked for it.** And I finally understood just how much work they had put in. Maybe some of them were smarter than me, got to where I wanted to be with less trouble than me, but that just meant that I would feel a greater sense of reward when I reached their level.

Changing habits will make learning Japanese easier. But even changing habits will require effort, because that is in and of itself a goal. And goals, at their core, require us to **future wants in front of immediate wants.**

I don't know why, but for some reason sticking to audio lessons is one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for me. The reason, perhaps, is that they can fill just about any form of low quality time. In other words, there are a lot of opportunities for me to utilize them and, in turn, a lot of opportunities for me to be lazy about them. If I really, really want to learn Japanese, then there's no reason why I shouldn't be listening to audio lessons while I eat breakfast, lunch. I should be listening to them while I exercise, drive.

Language learning is all about numbers. **The more hours of lessons you listen to, the better your Japanese will become.**

But what to listen to? For that, we've got...

### *Ninja Tool #5 – JapanesePod101*

JapanesePod101 is a lot more than a Japanese podcast.

Yeah, that's the main focus, but really it could also be used for your grammar studies. I didn't use it for grammar, because by the time I discovered JapanesePod101, I already knew a lot of Japanese grammar. But I have read quite a few of their lesson PDF's, and I think they've got a pretty good thing going. For now, though, let's talk about the listening portion of things.

I truly believe that JapanesePod101 is an indispensable resource for learning Japanese. Rosetta Stone, Pimsleur, other podcasts—none of them are on the same level as JapanesePod101:

JapanesePod101

<http://nihongoshark.com/JapanesePod101>

The reason that I'm such a die-hard supporter of JapanesePod101 is that, after a while, their lessons get to be very advanced. Although I can understand and enjoy most of Japanese anime, TV shows, and radio, I still listen to JapanesePod101 frequently. And every time I do, I learn new Japanese. Every time.

It might sound strange to point out, but...

1. I learn new Japanese every time I listen to JapanesePod101.
2. So, if I listen to *a lot* of lessons, then I will learn *a lot* of Japanese.
3. If I learn *a lot* of Japanese, then my Japanese will improve, and I'll get to [whatever ridiculous ninja level I'm aiming for].

To be entirely honest, I don't like recommending a study program that costs money, but luckily JapanesePod101 is quite affordable. Also, compared to the amount of Japanese content you get from other things that cost money, I'd say that it's really cheap.

I definitely don't regret purchasing it for myself. Still, if you're not willing to pay, you can still find some good, free podcasts through iTunes, though they're unlikely to be as structured or helpful as JapanesePod101. Hey, something is better than nothing, right?

**The most important part of Phase #1 Listening Prep is just that you Nihongo-ify your life.** You'll be amazed at how much your comprehension increases with constant, structured, level-appropriate listening practice.

If you're going to go with JapanesePod101, then you should download all of the lessons for a given level, then put them on your computer, phone/mp3 player, and/or burn them onto CD's. You want to make it as easy as possible to have them playing when you're available for listening. I'll give detailed instructions on my recommended listening techniques [later in Phase #3](#).

There was a time that I didn't have hookups to listen to my mp3 player in the car, and I had to burn hundreds of JapanesePod101 lessons onto CD's so that I could listen to them on my way to work. And I'm so glad I did!

It helps if you only download one level at a time. This keeps them from getting mixed up by your smartphone or mp3 player. So, maybe start with 'Absolute Beginner Lessons' or 'Newbie Lessons.' Listen to them. Then maybe listen to them again at 2x speed. Then, when you feel you're picking up everything that's being said in the dialogues *without English*, move onto the next level. There's always more to listen to. Again, the listening approach that I recommend specifically is much more intricate than this, but I'm saving the details for [later on in this guide](#).

### ***Let Audio Lessons Be Your Rock***

I'm coming at you with a lot of information in this guide, and that can be ridiculously overwhelming.

At times when you feel like all of this is just way too much, **audio lessons can be the thing that keeps you relaxed and on track**. This is why I think audio lessons are such a great entry point for language learners.

Starting a new language is mostly just an overload of information and things to learn—everybody has theories about how you should study; lots of people complain that X is impossible, so you should just give up (like they did); others tell you that X, Y, and Z are all possible and effortless... if you just give them a few hundred dollars; Wikipedia makes your head spin with linguistic jargon. Learn all of these kanji. Learn all of this vocab. Learn all of this grammar. Start speaking from day one. Speak all day, every day, even to your cat. Take this course. Read this book. Now, now, now. Go, go, go—and *forget it, I quit.*

It's stressful, yeah?

But when we feel stressed and confused, we can just chill out and kick it with some lessons. Forget about what's important, what's time-effective, how much you need to learn.

***Just put on your headphones, lie down in bed, and listen.***

Yes, I'm seriously recommending this if you feel overwhelmed. Because you might find that if you stop pressuring yourself so much to learn, you'll realize that Japanese is really interesting all on its own. If you're reading this guide, then you might feel (like I do), that just hearing people talk about Japanese is interesting. So start there.

Let simple audio lessons be a source of comfort and motivation.

They're *comforting*, because your language ability starts improving just by sitting there

and listening to someone talk.

They're *motivating*, because you'll be hearing native speakers use the language, and you might just remember why you wanted to learn Japanese in the first place.

Also, I find that audio lessons are a great tool to keep me on track, because lessons are a *productive* form of study. A common problem I have when starting new languages is to let all of my time get sucked up by *activity*, when really it should go to *productivity*.

Audio lessons are the easiest way to expose yourself to a new language. If you're tired, and you don't feel like studying, well that's okay. Just put on your headphones and don't listen actively. Something is better than nothing. Also, **there are structured ways to do this so that even if you're only passively listening, you're still actively studying.** (See Phase #3)

So, yeah, I recommend starting audio lessons from Day #1.

They're my fallback. My constant. My rock. My shoulder to cry on.

And there's no reason to postpone starting them.

Good? Ok, let's move on. Hang in there; we've only got three Phase #1 preps left! And this next one won't require any studying at all. Awesome, ya?

### Phase #1 Progress:

- ✓ Mindset Prep
- ✓ Vocab Prep
- ✓ Listening Prep
- Reference Prep
- Grammar Prep
- Speaking Prep

## Reference Prep

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It may sound a little bit strange to prep your Japanese references, but when it comes time to use them, it'll be nice knowing exactly where to turn.

This section has 4 Ninja Tools. Get excited!

### *Ninja Tool #6 – Japanese Language Packs*

Since we'll be needing to type Japanese for a significant portion of our studies, we need to make sure that our computers are equipped to handle Japanese characters.



#### *Installing Japanese Keyboards*

Here are instructions for installing keyboards for other languages on [Windows 8](#), and here are the instructions for [Mac OS X 10.6](#). I also found some instructions written specifically for Japanese [on this website](#).

#### *Typing in Japanese*

Typing in Japanese can be a bit tricky at times. I am planning to write an awesome and informative article about this... but... uh, yeah, that hasn't happened yet.

Tae Kim's site has some notes about it [on this page](#). Also, there's a Wikipedia article about it [here](#).

Best of luck to all of your digitally impaired kids!

### *Ninja Tool #7 – Online Dictionaries*

When you're a beginner at Japanese, it SUCKS trying to look up words you don't know. Specifically, you'll probably run into two problems:

*(1) There's a word that you want to look up, but you don't know its kanji, which means, in turn, that you don't know how to look it up in a dictionary.*

For (a real) example (that happened to my friend recently), let's say you're reading some manga that doesn't have furigana (= hiragana on top of kanji so that you know how to read them). You get through like two or three pages without looking up a single word, and you're starting to feel like a boss. But then, boom. Ridiculous kanji in your face. You see

the word 嘘喧嘩, and you're like *WTF, man?!* (Props to those of you that can read this, by the way.) And your life is ruined. And you might spend a very long time trying to figure out what this word means.

The worst part is that this is a very common word: 嘘喧嘩 = けんか = *kenka* = "fight; quarrel." It's probably in your intro to Japanese book. But when it's in that book, they probably write it in katakana: ケンカ. Also, it's not one of the "general-use characters" (=Jōyō Kanji), so even if you've learned "all of the kanji," you still probably don't know it.

- (2) *You find a word in a dictionary, but either: (a) There aren't any example sentences attached, or (b) You're not sure if the example sentences alongside it are natural things that Japanese people actually say.*

I have learned so many Japanese words that other Japanese people don't know or use. In other words, I've wasted a lot of time learning words that don't improve my functional Japanese ability.

Long story short, we're going to need some good tools for looking up words that we don't know, along with ways to look up natural phrasing for those words. When possible, I'll also explain some little tricks for dealing with the two problems above.

**Note:** Some of these explanations are probably going to be a bit technical, and a lot of them won't pertain to absolute beginners. If you come across an explanation that's not relevant to you, then feel free to just skip it and move on. For those that are feeling at all overwhelmed, go ahead and just skip the entire "Reference Prep" section of Phase #1 and go onto "Grammar Prep." Skipping this section will not affect your progress throughout this guide... although you'll probably want to come back and look at it again once you get into your study groove.

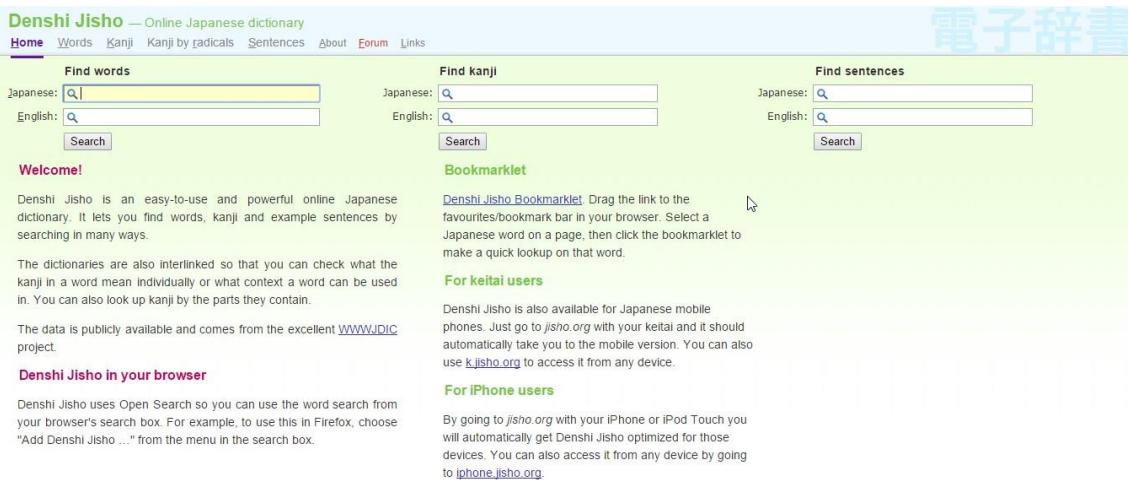
For each online dictionary listed, rather than explain boring features, I'll just walk through an example.

### [Jisho.org](http://jisho.org)

Before I reached an advanced level of Japanese, [Jisho.org](http://jisho.org) was my go-to resource for looking up any and all Japanese words. I'm not sure if it's an effect of my skills improving or technology changing, but nowadays I almost never use this site, opting for other resources that I will be describing in a moment.

The thing that I like about [Jisho.org](http://jisho.org) is that it's very beginner-friendly.

Here's a screenshot of the homepage:



Now, let's say I'm trying to look up that word 嘩嘩. I don't know how to pronounce this word, so I'm going to click on "Kanji by radicals:"



This will take me to a page with a bunch of scary kanji radicals (Note: a “radical” is essentially just a kanji building block.):



I scroll through and find the pieces of the first kanji, 喰. This will seem exhausting the first handful of times that you do it, but you kind of get used to it after a while... maybe...

Looking through the pieces of kanji on the chart, I find and click the little “mouth”

(from left side of 喰), then the “roof” (from the top right side):



Just by clicking those, Jisho.org narrows it down to 42 possible kanji for me, and, scrolling along, I find it:

**Found 42 kanji** (Jouyou kanji are colored darker)

8 宕宮 9 客咤 10 容害宮 11 菴寄崆 12 嘘棺  
館囊寰 17 轶蹇豁寧 18 額鎔



Yay! So I click on that guy, and it brings me to the kanji's page, where I can see a whole bunch of information about it:

<b>喧</b>		<a href="#">Words containing</a> <a href="#">Words beginning with</a> <a href="#">Words ending in</a> <a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">External links</a>			
12 strokes		Radical: <b>口</b> (KanXi: 30) Parts: <a href="#">二</a> <a href="#">口</a> <a href="#">宀</a>			
<b>Jinmeiyou</b> kanji used in names					
2249 of 2500 most used kanji in newspapers					
Japanese kun: <a href="#">かまひす.しい</a> , <a href="#">やかま.しい</a>		Readings			
Japanese on: <a href="#">ケン</a>		Chinese: <a href="#">xuan1</a>		Korean: <a href="#">hweon</a>	
English meanings	Spanish meanings	Portuguese meanings	French meanings		
boisterous; noisy;	bullicioso; escandaloso; ruidoso;				
<b>Stroke order</b>					
					
<b>Dictionary indices</b>			<b>Classifications</b>		
962	Classic Nelson	6301.6	Four corner code		
3976	Daikanwa Jiten (Morohashi) (Volume 2, page 1096)	3d9.12	The Kanji Dictionary		
1541	Japanese Names	1-3-9	SKIP code		
856	New Nelson				
2163	Remembering The Kanji				
<b>Codepoints</b>			<b>Codepoints</b>		
23-86	JIS X 0208-1997 kuten code	23-86	JIS X 0208-1997 kuten code		
55a7	Unicode hex code	55a7	Unicode hex code		

Now I click on “Words containing,” so that I can see words that this (quite rare) kanji shows up in:

33 words pop up. And, what do you know, the first one on the list is my word:

Found 33 words.

喧嘩	けんか	quarrel; brawl; fight; squabble; scuffle
Common word, Noun, Suru verb		<a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">Kanji details</a> <a href="#">External links</a>
喧然	けんぜん	noisy; boisterous; lively
Taru-adjective, Adverb taking the 'to' particle		<a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">Kanji details</a> <a href="#">External links</a>
喧噪	けんそう	tumult; great noise; clatter; hustle and bustle
Noun, Na-adjective		<a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">Kanji details</a> <a href="#">External links</a>
喧騒	けんそう	tumult; great noise; clatter; hustle and bustle
Noun, Na-adjective		<a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">Kanji details</a> <a href="#">External links</a>

But sometimes clicking one kanji will bring up thousands of words. When that happens, it helps to tick the “Common words only” box and then hit search:

That narrows it down to only two words, both of which you should know if you’re planning to be a boss at Japanese:

Found 2 words.

喧嘩	けんか	quarrel; brawl; fight; squabble; scuffle
<i>Common word, Noun, Suru verb</i>		<a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">Kanji details</a> <a href="#">External links</a>
喧しい	やかましい	<b>1:</b> ( <i>Usually written using kana alone</i> ) noisy; boisterous <b>2:</b> strict; faultfinding; carping; fussy
<i>Common word, Adjective</i>		<a href="#">Sentences</a> <a href="#">Kanji details</a> <a href="#">External links</a>

If you tick the box for “Common words only,” but you don’t see the word you’re looking for, then maybe it’s not that important for you to know anyways, or not important enough for you to spend yet even more time searching for it, so you can just skip it and go on reading your manga.

If you want to see this word used in a sentence, you could click the “Sentences” link next to it. Or, per my advice, you could copy and paste it into our next online dictionary...

### [Weblio](#)

The main reason that I love [Weblio](#) so much is that the website pulls words, definitions, and example sentences from a wide variety of dictionaries.

Here’s the homepage (<http://ejje.weblio.jp/>):

The screenshot shows the homepage of Weblio, a Japanese-English dictionary. At the top, there are links for '辞書' (Dictionary), '翻訳' (Translation), '対義語辞典' (Antonym Dictionary), '英和・和英辞典' (Bilingual Dictionary), '日中中日辞典' (Chinese-Japanese Dictionary), '日韓韓日辞典' (Korean-Japanese Dictionary), '古語辞典' (Archaic Language Dictionary), and 'その他の辞書' (Other Dictionaries). The top right features a 'Guest' login link, a 'ログイン' (Login) button, a '辞書総合TOP' (Dictionary General Top) link, and a 'ヘルプ' (Help) link. A large orange banner for 'JS英語の学校ナビ' (JS English School Navigator) offers '英会話教室3,000件以上!' (Over 3,000 English conversation classes) and '入学でもれなく1,000円もらえる!' (Get 1,000 yen for free on admission). Below the banner is a search bar with tabs for '英和・和英辞典', '英語例文', '英語類語', '共起表現', '英単語帳', '英語力診断', '英語翻訳', '英会話', and 'もっと見る▼'. The search bar includes a dropdown for 'と一致する' (Match), a '項目を検索' (Search item) button, a '検索フォームの固定解除' (Release fixed search form) link, a '小窓表示' (Small window display) link, and a 'ランダム表示' (Random display) link. A '急上昇キーワード' (Rising keyword) list includes 'exodus', 'take', 'necessary', 'quite', and 'amazing'. The main content area features a 'テキスト翻訳' (Text translation) box with a placeholder 'ここに翻訳したい文章を入力して下さい。' (Please input the text you want to translate.) and a '翻訳する' (Translate) button. Below this is a 'weblioの広告を消してサクサク検索。' (Remove weblio ads for a smooth search.) button with a '今すぐ広告を消す!' (Remove ads now!) link. To the right, there is an advertisement for 'iHerb.com' featuring various health products like a green water bottle and a container of 'Organic Wheat Grass'. A sidebar on the right shows a 'こんにちは ゲストさん' (Hello Guest) message, a 'ログイン' (Login) link, and links for '新規会員登録(無料)' (New member registration (free)) and 'メール配信のご案内' (Email distribution information). A bottom box for 'weblio Premium' offers a '広告無しでサクッと検索!' (Search without ads!) and a '60日間無料お試しキャンペーン実施中!' (60-day free trial campaign underway!).

You'll notice that there are a bunch of ads, which is one of the downsides to Weblio, as they can become a bit obtrusive at times. Also, down there in the bottom-right corner, they have an ad for "Weblio Premium," a paid, ad-free version that I'm way too cheap to even consider.

Anyways, from the homepage there are really only a few links you need to understand:

The search bar at the top of the page has several tabs: '英和・和英辞典' (Bilingual Dictionary), '英語例文' (English Examples), '英語類語' (English Collocations), '共起表現' (Co-occurrence Expressions), '英単語帳' (English Vocabulary List), and '英語力診断' (English Proficiency Diagnosis). Below the tabs is a search input field containing '喧嘩' (yakenka). To the right of the input field are buttons for 'と一致する' (Match), a dropdown for 'と一致する' (Match), and a large orange '項目を検索' (Search item) button with a cursor pointing to it. Below the search bar are several small navigation icons.

You can see that there are a bunch of tabs that we can use. However, you'll probably only need the first two: J-E, E-J Dictionary (英和・和英辞典) and (English) Example Sentences (英語例文).

I've already typed (or copied and pasted) the word I want to look up into the search bar:

喧嘩. And my cursor is hovering over the search button. I click it, and...

喧嘩

意味 例文 類語 + 単語帳に追加

研究社 新和英中辞典

研究社

**けんか<sup>3</sup> 喧嘩**

- 〈口論〉 a quarrel; a row; a squabble (くだらない); 〈口語〉 a fight
- 〈論争〉 a dispute
- 〈暴力を含んだ〉 a fight; a brawl (荒々しい); a scuffle (つかみ合い)

**けんかする**

- 〈口論する〉 quarrel [have a quarrel] 《with somebody over [about] something}; have words 《with》
- 〈仲たがいする〉 fall out 《with somebody over something》
- 〈暴力を用いる〉 fight; scuffle

**けんかの種**

- the reason for [cause of] a quarrel

**けんかになる**

- 〈口論に〉 start quarreling; get into an argument 《【形式】ばった表現】 altercation 《with somebody over something》; 《事が主語》 turn into a quarrel
- 〈なくり合いの〉 start fighting; get into a fight 《with》; come to blows 《with》; 《事が主語》 turn into a fight

**けんか好きな**

- quarrelsome

用例

- 私が間に入って2人のけんかをとめてやった. I stepped in and settled the quarrel between them.

#### 喧嘩を売る[仕掛ける, 吹っかける]

I get a whole bunch of words. I can also scroll down further to look at entries from other dictionaries:

## 喧嘩

読み方:けんか

説明 とも書く

文法情報 (名詞、サ変名詞)

対訳 quarrel; brawl; fight; squabble; scuffle

[索引トップ 用語の索引 ランキング](#)

## 喧嘩

quarrel[索引トップ 用語の索引 ランキング](#)

## 喧嘩

Some of you might be thinking, that's cool and all, but I can't read all of those kanji, so I'd be totally lost. Well, later I'll introduce Ninja Tool #7, which will solve this problem for you. For now, let's just not worry about it.

The real value of [Weblio](#) is in the database of example sentences that it has access to. Let's go take a look at it by clicking the Example Sentences link at the top of the page.

れいぶん

You can find a link for it just above the first entry. It says 例文:

## けんか<sup>3</sup> 嘘嘩

- ・〈口論〉 a quarrel; a row; a squabble (くだらない); 《口語》 a fight
- ・〈論争〉 a dispute
- ・〈暴力を含んだ〉 a fight; a brawl (荒々しい); a scuffle (つかみ合い)

### けんかする

- ・〈口論する〉 quarrel [have a quarrel] 《with somebody over [about] something}; have words 《with》
- ・〈仲たがいする〉 fall out 《with somebody over something》
- ・〈暴力を用いる〉 fight; scuffle

### けんかの種

Here are my results:

例文カテゴリの絞込み: 全て ビジネス(64) ことわざ・名言(3)

情報源の絞込み: 標準設定(すべての情報源から検索) ▾

意味	例文	類語	セーフサーチ:オン ▾
「喧嘩」を含む例文一覧			該当件数: 342件
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 次へ >			

- それは喧嘩だ。  
That's a fight. - Weblio Email例文集
- 喧嘩をするな  
Don't fight - Weblio Email例文集
- 恋人間の喧嘩  
a quarrel between lovers - EDR日英対訳辞書
- 喧嘩し続ける  
to continue quarreling - EDR日英対訳辞書
- 彼らは喧嘩ばかりする。  
All they do is fight. - Weblio Email例文集
- 私は彼と喧嘩をした。  
I had a fight with him. - Weblio Email例文集
- 私は父と喧嘩した。  
I fought with my father. - Weblio Email例文集
- 好んで喧嘩をする人  
a person who is willing to quarrel - EDR日英対訳辞書
- 芝居で喧嘩の場面

At the top right there, you'll see that it pulled 342 sentences. This actually isn't very many, though, for such a common word. The reason is that the dictionary is only looking up example sentences that use the kanji. So, let's try this again with only the

hiragana for 喧嘩, which is けんか:

例文カテゴリの絞込み: [全て](#) [ビジネス\(158\)](#) [法律\(1358\)](#) [金融\(1249\)](#) [コンピュータ・IT\(35\)](#) [日常\(2\)](#)  
[ことわざ・名言\(10\)](#)

情報源の絞込み: [標準設定\(すべての情報源から検索\)](#)

意味	例文	セーフサーチ:オン
「けんか」を含む例文一覧		該当件数: 17668件

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) ... [353](#) [354](#) [次へ>](#)

- **けんか**を売る.  
seek a quarrel  - 研究社 新英和中辞典
- 酒の上の**けんか**.  
a drunken brawl [quarrel]  - 研究社 新英和中辞典
- …**にけんか**を売る.  
pick a quarrel with...  - 研究社 新英和中辞典
- **けんか**を止める.  
stop a quarrel  - 研究社 新英和中辞典
- **(けんかを)やめろ**.  
Break it up!  - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- 警官と**けんか**する.  
have a run-in with the police  - 研究社 新英和中辞典

17,668 sentences! Wow. But that's way too many for me to even fathom. Also, some of the sentences are going to be a little strange, because they're not all from reliable sources. However, we have a trick for that.

(**Note:** the following text, which I've not colored red is now a paid-only feature of [Weblio](#). It's still useful information for when trying to decide which example sentence to use, but the ability to filter by dictionary is no longer free. Not cool.)

Just above the results, there is a dropdown box, which can be used to filter your results:

These are basically all a bunch of different dictionaries. Here are some tips for choosing a source for example sentences:

けんきゅうしゃ

✧ Anything that starts with **研究社** is probably good, because it's made by Kenkyusha, which is a legitimate dictionary-writing company.

わえい

✧ It helps to look at dictionaries that have **和英** (Japanese → English) written,

えいわ

instead of **英和** (English → Japanese), because we are looking for sentences

that *started out as Japanese*, not weird Japanese that someone wrote trying to translate an English phrase.

✧ Leave out anything that has the word Weblia in it, because a lot of those tend to have strange English and/or Japanese. I think it's because the people writing them are volunteers or something.

✧ If it says JMdict, then it is referring to sentences that you could have found on

Jisho.org, which uses that dictionary. In other words, you could be using the more English-friendly Jisho.org to find that sentence.

- ❖ The numbers next to each dictionary indicate how many example sentences there are for that dictionary.

せんもんてき じょうほうげん

- ❖ Anything under the bold letters **専門的な情報源** is going to come from a technical dictionary/resource, so they're probably not going to be very useful... unless you're looking up medical vocab, IT terminology, etc.

So, based on all of that information, which dictionary do you suppose I'm going to choose?

けんきゅうしゃ しんわえいちゅうじてん

If you said **研究社 新和英中辞典**, then you're absolutely correct:

#### 元の設定に戻す

標準設定(すべての情報源から検索)

#### 総合的な情報源

研究社 新英和中辞典 (105)

研究社 新和英中辞典 (72)



Weblioビジネス英語例文 (1)

Weblio Email例文集 (156)

Weblio英語基本例文集 (53)

浜島書店 Catch a Wave (151)

Weblioビジネス英文メールテンプレート文例集 (1)

英語ことわざ教訓辞典 (4)

JMdict (1)

#### 専門的な情報源

研究社 英和コンピューター用語辞典 (3)

斎藤和英大辞典 (280)

科学技術論文動詞集 (5)

法令用語日英標準対訳辞書 (2)

日本語WordNet (339)

コンピューター用語辞典 (11)

I would choose that dictionary, because: (1) It's made by Kenkyusha, which is a reliable

source; (2) **和英** is in the title, so I know that the sentences started out as Japanese.

Now I have a list of 72 example sentences that are highly likely to be natural, correct usage of my target word:

例文カテゴリの絞込み: 全て ビジネス(158) 法律(1358) 金融(1249) コンピュータ・IT(35) 日常(2)  
ことわざ・名言(10)

情報源の絞込み: 研究社 新和英中辞典 (72)

意味 例文 セーフサーチ:オン  
「けんか」を含む例文一覧 該当件数: 72件

1 2 次へ>

- **(けんかを)やめろ.**  
Break it up! - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **金持ちけんかせず.**  
A rich man never quarrels. - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **けんか両成敗.**  
In a quarrel both parties are to blame. - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **僕はけんかは弱い.**  
I'm no good at fighting. - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **相手のないけんかはできない.**  
It takes two to make a quarrel. - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **彼らは会えば必ずけんかをする.**  
They never meet without quarreling. - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **売られたけんかなら買ってやる.**  
I will do it if I am dared to. - 研究社 新和英中辞典
- **ここはけんか両成敗だ.**  
I think you're both in the wrong. - 研究社 新和英中辞典

On a side note, when going through example sentences, especially if you're planning to make flashcards with them (which I'll talk about a lot later in this guide), I'd try to avoid anything that sounds like a proverb, because chances are that no one is saying it in

かねも  
金持ちけんかせず /  
Japanese. For example, above we have **kanemochi kenka sezu**,

*kanemochi kenka sezu*, which is translated to “A rich man never quarrels.” Maybe I think that sounds cool. So I plan to use it the next time I’m with my Japanese friends, so they can all stand in awe of my J-skills. Only, they’ve probably never heard that phrase before. Bummer, right? If only all proverbs were also clichés, then you could go spouting off all of those.

On the other hand, a Japanese person would definitely understand the meaning of that proverb. So maybe if you said it with enough confidence and style, you might be able to get away with it. If you’re more like me, though, and you stumble through it like a fool, then they’re probably going to frown at you and be like, “No one says that.” And now your ancestors are shamed.

### *Considering a Denshi Jisho*

I’m a sucker, because about five years ago I bought one of those electronic dictionaries でんし jisho (電子辞書 / *denshi jisho*) that you will see Japanese people carrying around all of the time. Everyone at school was like, “You should get one of those things, man. They’re awesome. Your Japanese will be super-powered within like three minutes of buying one.”

So, yeah, I fell for it, and I bought one of these:



Yeah, those are cool, because they have huge databases of words, example sentences, and all of that good stuff. I even saw one that pointed out intonation of Japanese words, which is super awesome (and hard to find). However, at the end of the day, they are simply not worth the money.

#### Reasons they are not worth the money:

- ✧ If you have a smartphone, then a good dictionary application (I'll introduce some later on) should be more than enough for your study needs.
- ✧ *Denshi jisho* are not good for looking up kanji. It's a mess, honestly, because these are designed to be used by Japanese people... and Japanese people have weird-o messed up ways of looking up kanji, yeah?
- ✧ Even if you absolutely MUST have a legitimate *denshi jisho*, then it is way cheaper and more effective to make your own. I have my own on my computer, which I made following some of the advice that I saw on [JapaneseLanguageTools.com](http://JapaneseLanguageTools.com), coupled with some articles that I read in Japanese. I don't use it all that often, but sometimes it comes in handy when I'm translating.
- ✧ You can even put your own customized *denshi jisho* onto your own portable device. Instructions for this can also be found at [JapaneseLangaugeTools.com](http://JapaneseLangaugeTools.com). (He charges some money to help you set that stuff up. But it's all pretty reasonable.)

## How to Look Up Natural Phrasing of Words

It's so hard to find natural phrasing for new Japanese words. Above, I explained one tactic for doing this using [Weblia](#). There are a couple of other options, too, though...

### Using Ameba Blogs

Ameblo (<http://ameblo.jp/>) is a Japanese blogging site. Kind of like tumblr or Blogspot, I suppose... only it's populated by a bunch of Japanese people (and celebrities)! Here's [the homepage](#):

The screenshot shows the Ameblo homepage with a green header banner. The banner features the Ameba logo, a search bar, and a button to search. The text on the banner reads: "無料でカンタン、アメーバIDを登録しよう!" (Register your Ameba ID for free!) and "一度の登録で、ブログやコミュニティ、スマホまでぜんぶ楽しめる♪" (With one registration, you can enjoy blogs, communities, and mobile devices, etc.). Below the banner are two buttons: "アメーバIDを登録する" (Register Ameba ID) and "マイページに行く" (Go to My Page). A note below the buttons says: "● 他ブログからアメプロへのお引越しはこちら". The main content area has a section titled "芸能人・有名人ブログランキング" (Famous Person Blog Ranking) with a grid of 7 thumbnails. To the right is a sidebar titled "芸能ブログニュース" (Famous Person Blog News) with a list of 10 news items. The news items include: SHEILA 「もう1人子供が欲しい」 (Hot!), えみり、娘と夫の舞台を観劇, 美奈子 家族で久々の集合写真 (NEW!), 田中雅美 友人の結婚式に出席, AKINA、出演作を見に来た父親, スザンヌ、グラデヘアに変更 (NEW!), hitomi、家族でスシローへ, 松嶋尚美 家族が手料理を拒否 (NEW!), 飯田圭織、息子の目に不安, and 益若つばさ「意外?」な学生時代.

Maybe you're thinking, uh, who cares, man? And I get that. But the reason that [Ameblo](#) is awesome for us Japanese nerds is that you can search the content of all of its blogs for words that you're trying to learn.

See that search box in the upper right corner? Well, we can put a word that we're trying to learn in there:



We can also go straight to the Search page at [search.ameba.jp](http://search.ameba.jp):



We hit “Search” (検索 / *kensaku*) and, Boom! Japanese goodness:

**ブログ記事の検索結果** 117,000件中 1-10件を表示

**喧嘩番長6と刀剣乱舞始めました**  
3DS「喧嘩番長6 ソウル&ブラッド」まさか3DSで出るとは思っていなかったです(出るとしたら vitaだとばかりちょっと進めてみましたが、今回の主人公はなんと言いますか…困った性格です(何か訳があるようですが学校生活で… [2015年01月18日]  
図だらんとね

**乳がん検診～チキンの反抗～**  
…りてきますからあー『局所麻酔でやる』鬼畜。閻魔大王もビックリの鬼畜っぷり。あまり私がしつこいもんだから、ちょっとダルそう。いやいやダレたいの、こっちだからあんた喧嘩したら逆ギレするタイプ?私もよ?←違う違う、そうじ… [2015年01月18日]  
図新米主婦のブチブラコーデ時々おうちご飯

**静かで平和。**  
…昨日の夜ごはん一昨日はすきやき昨日はすきやきの残りにうどんを入れて食べた写真なし唯一サラダだけ撮ってたベビーリーフとトマト金曜日から双子ちゃん達母の家にお泊りとても静か喧嘩したら電話すぐかかるけど末っ子君の離乳食ジャ… [2015年01月18日]  
図\*三姉妹と末っ子君の家族6人節約日記\*

**侠・ほんくらの道**  
…襟首を掴もうとした時、酒向好晴が背後から、星川を抱きかかえた。そして、酒向が星川の耳元で言った。「組長、ここは人眼がありますので、我慢してください」河見彦もここで組長に喧嘩をさせることは、できないと思った。「親分、後で必ず… [2015年01月18日]  
図六天大魔王のブログ

See where my cursor is on that screenshot? It's showing that there are 117,000 results! What?! So, I can scroll through these results a bit. We're diving into 100% Japanese here, so some of you might want to wait until you reach an intermediate or upper-intermediate level before you fry your brain with all that squiggly stuff.

Just looking at a few of the blog entries that come up on the first page, I get to see a

けんか  
喧嘩  
bunch of different used of 喧嘩. Here's my favorite:

おはようございます

(Good Morning)

さくや ゆめみ  
昨夜はとんでもない夢見ましたね～ん！

(Last night I had a ridiculous dream!)

あね おおげんか ゆめ  
な、なんとお義姉さんと大喧嘩した夢ですね～ん！

(For some reason, I got into a huge fight with my sister-in-law!)

Anyways, I appear to have gotten sidetracked. The point I'm trying to make is that looking for natural phrasing of Japanese words doesn't have to be painful. In fact, it can be quite entertaining and enjoyable. And enjoying ourselves is a huge part of sticking it out for this long journey, right?

Also, don't fret if you think looking through blogs is way beyond your Japanese level right now. I remember when I first discovered [Ameblo](#), it melted my brain every time I looked at it. Now, I can actually read it and enjoy it. And I haven't really been studying for all that long. Also, I'm not any more capable than you are. Be patient. Keep swimming.

[Using Lang-8](#)



Some of you may already know [Lang-8.com](http://Lang-8.com), as the site appears to have increased in popularity a lot in the last few years. It's kind of like blogging meets language exchange. The concept is explained quite clearly on their homepage:



1. You write a blog post in Japanese.
2. A Japanese person corrects your mistakes.
3. You return the favor by correcting the mistakes of other people.

It's a really cool concept, and it's great to see that people studying languages are so eager to help one another. It might seem kind of strange that I'm putting this in the reference section, but I think that one of the best ways to learn natural phrasing of Japanese is to make mistakes in Japanese, then get corrected.

One extra awesome thing about Lang-8 is that there is a hugely disproportionate number of Japanese people using it. In other words, it is highly likely that you're going to get rad

corrections, like this:

- ✗ !」と考え直していました。
- ✓ !」と考え直していました。

| Quote | + 

- ✗ グループの皆は喧嘩する前に私「待ってよ！」
- ✓ グループの皆が喧嘩する前に私は「待ってよ！」

| Quote | + 

- ✗ 皆落ち着いて！

This sentence is perfect! No correction needed!

| Quote | + 

- ✗ xxxちゃん車で待ってなさいよ！」（日本語でLets talk this outは何？）と言います。
- ✓ xxxちゃん車で待ってなさいよ！」（日本語でLets talk this outは何？）と言います。

 "このことについて話し合おうよ"だと思います。

| Quote | + 

- ✗ 車で待っている後中学生のグループと話していく友達のために誤って皆は平気になりました。
- ✓ 車で待っている時私は、後中学生のグループと話していく友達のために謝謝って皆は平気になりました。

1 people think this correction is good. | Quote | + 

If you ever try [Lang-8.com](http://Lang-8.com) a try, I'd love to hear about it [in an email](#), because, to be perfectly honest, I've never used the site myself. By the time that I learned about its existence, I already had a pretty awesome network of Japanese friends and teachers that were helping to improve my atrocious mistakes.

### Using Language Exchanges

Later on ([in the Speaking Prep section](#)), I'm going to go into quite a bit of detail about language exchange partners. So, once you get one, you could just ask them to use any word in a sentence for you.

### *Ninja Tool #8 – Web Browser Plugins*

So, back in the Online Dictionaries section, we were filling up our web browsers with a

lot of nasty, intimidating Japanese words and kanji, right? It might seem overwhelming, but actually there are some really amazing tools for browsing the internet in Japanese.

You can download an add-on for your web browser that will automatically look up Japanese words for you when you scroll over them.

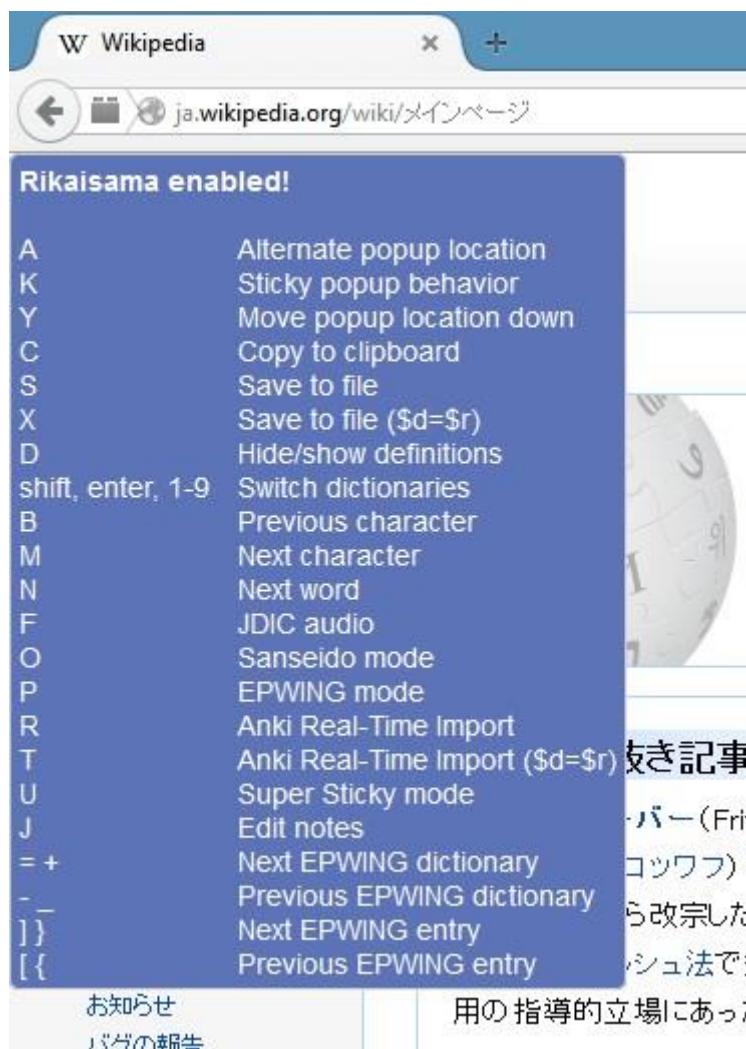
For example, let's say that I go to Japanese Wikipedia and, OMG, too much Japanese!



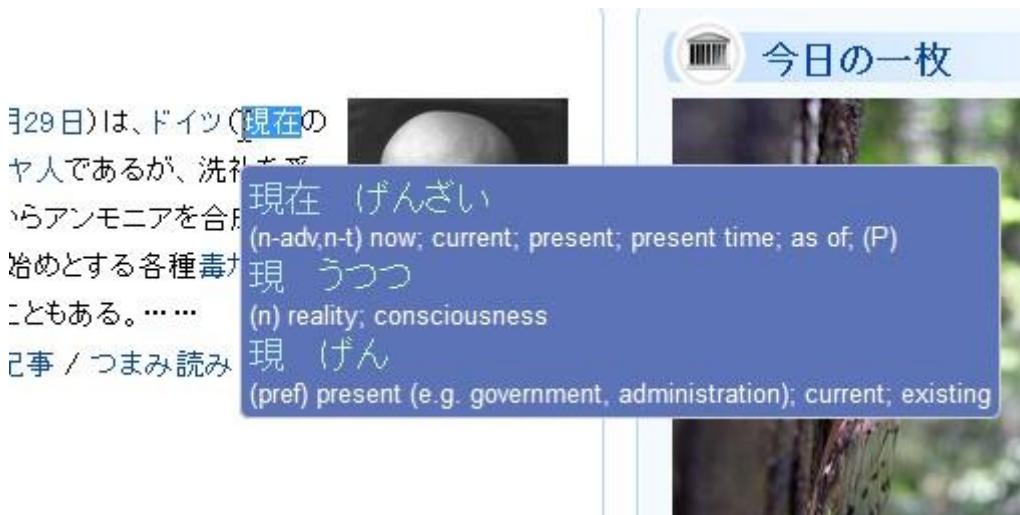
I could call my mom and tell her how hard my life is studying Japanese. Or, I could just activate [Rikaisama](#), my Japanese browsing ninja tool:



I click that, then [Rikaisama](#) tells me that it's enabled, and I have all of these super-duper options for looking stuff up:



So now, when I don't know a word, I can just scroll over it, and I'll get the definition, reading, and option to use any of those features listed above:



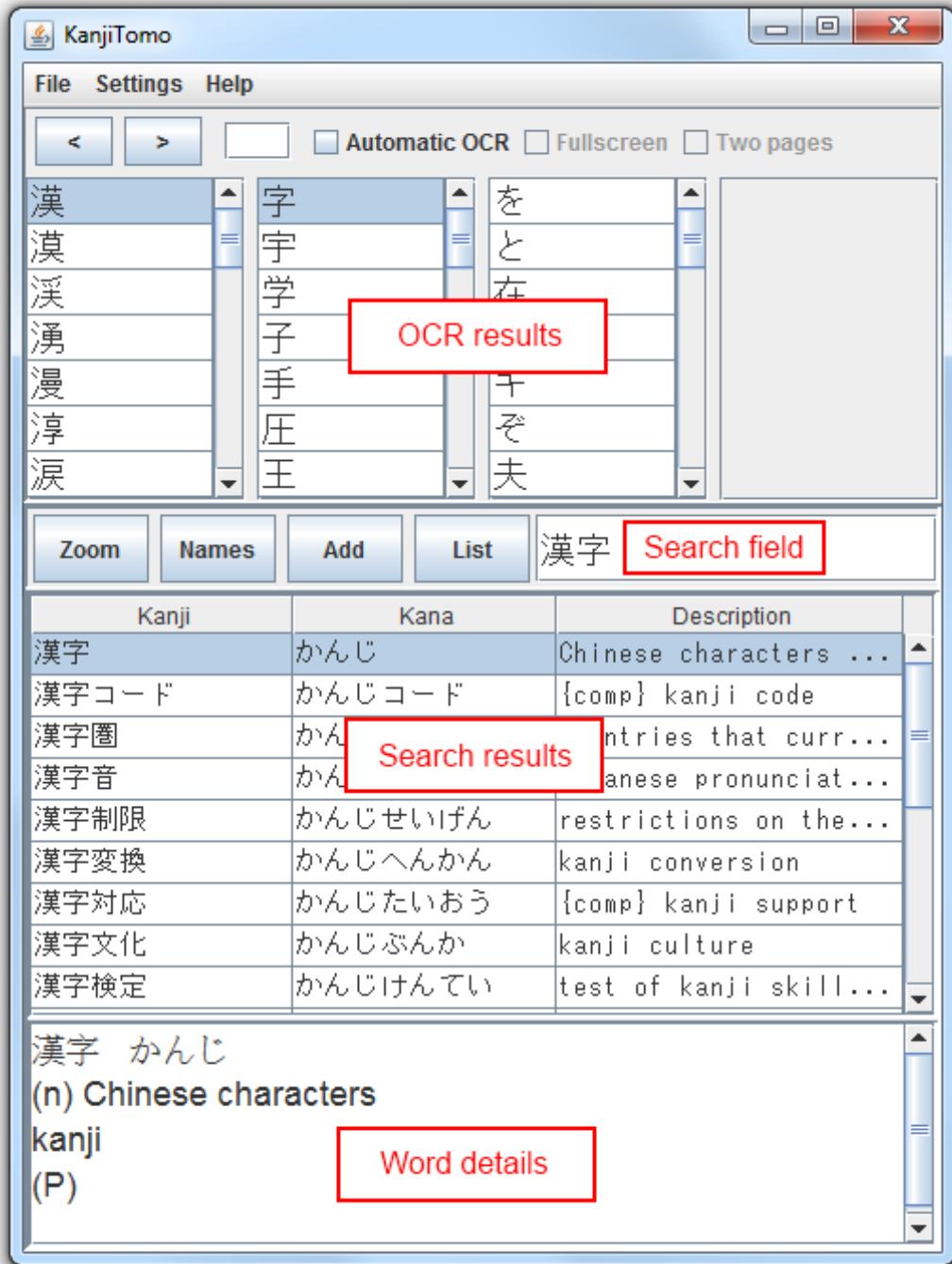
I don't know about you, but I think that's amazing. Don't you kind of want to browse the web in Japanese like right this second? Because, you know, you could if you wanted to.

As you may have guessed, my favorite of these tools is the Firefox add-on [Rikaisama](#), which I was using for the example above. I mostly like it for its speed, but also for its plethora of options and features, which are detailed on the [Rikaisama page](#). Unfortunately, I usually use Chrome, which means that I'm stuck using the add-on called [Rikaikun](#), which is about four-hundred times less cool.

This all started with [Rikaichan](#), by the way, the original and awesome Firefox plugin. So props to whoever made that, as well. If you're using Safari, then as far as I know, your only option is to use [Safarikai](#), which you can find [via this page](#).

I also just recently learned about a program called [KanjiTomo](#). The thing that differentiates [KanjiTomo](#) from the others is that it's not tied to a web browser. Instead, it uses Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to read kanji characters. This means that you can use it in a web browser, just like the other examples, but you can also use it on images and outside of web browsers, something the plugins above are not capable of doing. This is pretty cool, because a lot of times you'll see Japanese words online, but they're be inside of images, which means that [Rikaisama](#) and the like are rendered powerless. This is when you can get some help from your friend [KanjiTomo](#). Awesome!

Here's a screenshot (of what would happen if you scrolled over 漢字):



These are all free by the way. Props to people out there sharing the language love. So, yeah, **the homework assignment for Ninja Tool #7 is to add one of these life-saving plugins / add-ons / whatever to your computer** and never be afraid of a Japanese webpage ever again.

**Sudden Japanese Lesson:** Maybe some of you are wondering why these programs all start with “rikai.” *Rikai* means “understanding” or “comprehension” in Japanese.

りかい

Here’s the kanji: 理解 / *rikai*.

If you take the meaning of those two kanji separately, you get Logic (理) + Unravel (解). If you “unravel” the “logic” of something, then you *understand* it, right? That’s why, if we add する / *suru* to 理解 (understanding), then we can make it into the verb  
りかい  
理解する / *rikai suru* / “to understand; to comprehend.”

The kanji 理 shows up in a ton of words, but instead let’s look at 解 for a moment.

To make this as a verb all by itself, we just add く / *ku* to the end of it, making it 解く / *toku*, which means “to untie; to undo; (to unravel!).” And it’s totally okay to say that  
もんだい と  
you “unravel” a problem: 問題を解く / *mondai wo toku*, which, in more natural English, would probably become “to solve a problem.”

もんだい と のうりょく わたし  
その問題を解く能力は私にはまったくありません.

*sono mondai wo toku nouriyoku wa watashi ni wa mattaku arimasen.*

Solving that **problem** is totally beyond my capabilities. - 研究社 新和英中辞典

かのじょ すうがく もんだい ひと と  
彼女は数学の問題を一つずつ解いた.

*kanojo wa suugaku no mondai wo hitotsu zutsu toita.*

She **solved** math **problems** one by one. - 研究社 新和英中辞典

If any of you ever watch the anime *Naruto*, you may have noticed that when they break  
げんじゅつ  
an opponent’s 幻術 / *genjutsu* / “illusion technique,” they say *Kai!* Well, that’s

かく  
actually the *Onyomi* (reading) of 角牛. So, in a way, they're actually saying "Unravel!" Only, in more natural English this gets translated to "Release!"

Pretty cool, right? I love Japanese. (Wow, I'm a nerd.)

### *Ninja Tool #9 – Smartphone Apps*

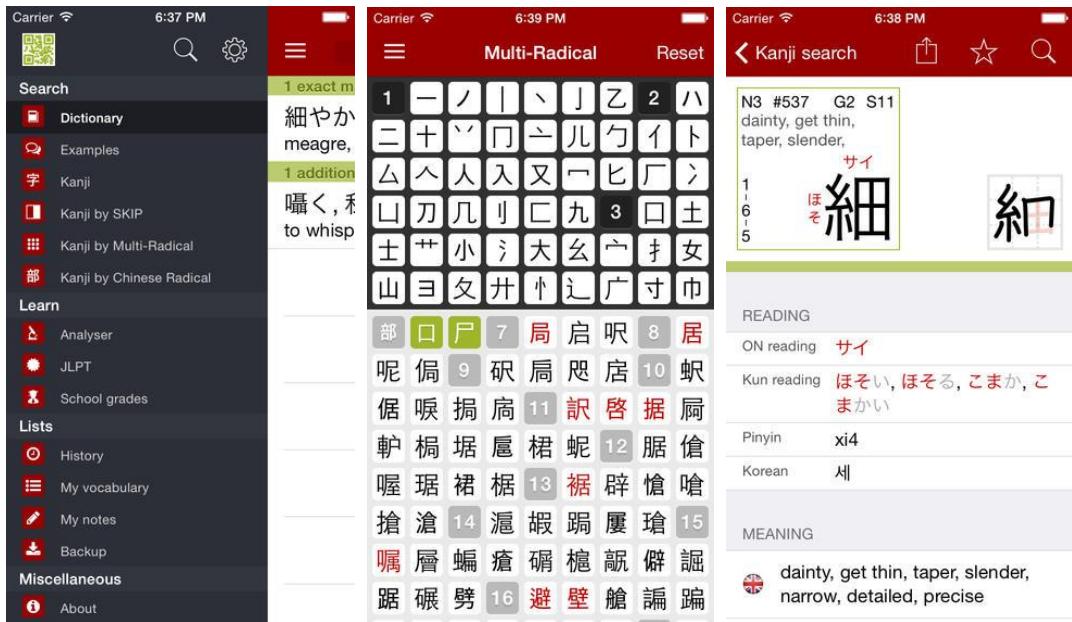
I started studying Japanese in an age when apps for studying Japanese were downright atrocious. Like, so bad. No worries, though. Your study journey will be much less strenuous than mine was.

The good thing about apps is that they're easily accessible, making them good for random bits of studying done in low quality time.

**Note:** I'm actually only talking about iOS apps in this section, because that's all I have experience with. I'm hoping that some readers (as in, you, my friend) could [email me](#) about the best apps for Droid devices, Windows devices, alien devices, etc. Please!

#### *imi wa?*

[imi wa?](#) is my favorite Japanese language learning app in the world (with the exception of Anki, because, well, that's not fair).



I'd like to give [imi wa?](#) my ★☆★Japanese Study App Awesomeness Award★☆★, which I just invented this very second. Here's why:

**Awesomeness Criteria #1** – It has a huge database of words.

**Awesomeness Criteria #2** – It is really easy to save words that I look up onto vocab lists.

**Awesomeness Criteria #3** – I can later take those vocab lists and use them to auto-generate Anki flashcards. In other words, it's relatively simple to use [imi wa?](#) as a bridge to memorizing long lists of vocabulary. That might sound technical and crazy, but it's actually just awesome, and I'll walk you through how to do it [later in this guide](#).

Here is the [link to imi wa? in the iTunes store](#).

As far as I know, the Google Play equivalent to this is IMI, which can be found [here](#).

### Anki

I wasn't even going to mention Anki, because I already wrote so much about it in the Vocab Prep section, and I'm going to mention it a lot in every phase of this guide. But, yeah, there's an app. It's really expensive if you have an iOS device, which is a bummer,

but it's free if you're on a Droid device. Score!

So, anyways, download if you can. Here is the [iTunes link](#). Here is the [Google Play link](#).

***“But the Anki App is \$25!”***

1. *Everyone and their mom.*

I agree that \$25 seems like a lot for a smartphone application, especially seeing how most apps don't cost any more than a few dollars, if anything.

However, I can unequivocally guarantee you that if you are serious about studying Japanese, then **this will be worth the money**.

As of this very second, I've logged **976 hours** using Anki. 976!

Doing the math, that means that Anki has cost me **under \$0.03 per hour, or \$0.00043 per minute**. Perhaps you can see why I'd say it's worth the money. But, you know, we all have our own things that we do and do not like paying money for. My grandfather used to frequent two different dollar stores so that he "didn't get screwed," but then he'd go and blow hundreds of dollars at the horse races. Go figure.

Reference Prep Complete! Congratulations! Let's keep this momentum going...

**Phase #1 Progress:**

- ✓ Mindset Prep
- ✓ Vocab Prep
- ✓ Listening Prep
- ✓ Reference Prep
- Grammar Prep
- Speaking Prep

## Grammar Prep

Today I was walking home from the gym in Sapporo (which is where I'm at right now),

and while I was walking I was listening to Spanish lessons from [SpanishPod101](#). (No, I have no idea why I'm studying Spanish.) Anyways, it was one of their really old lessons, from way back in 2008. And, listening to it, I realized how much better their lessons have gotten better over the years, because they were explaining a whole bunch of grammar conjugations (like every Spanish class in my life), and it was *so boring*. I noticed that every time they talked about grammar this or grammar that, my brain just sort of tuned it out and started thinking about how there's a lot of snow in Sapporo, or how I'd really love a coffee.

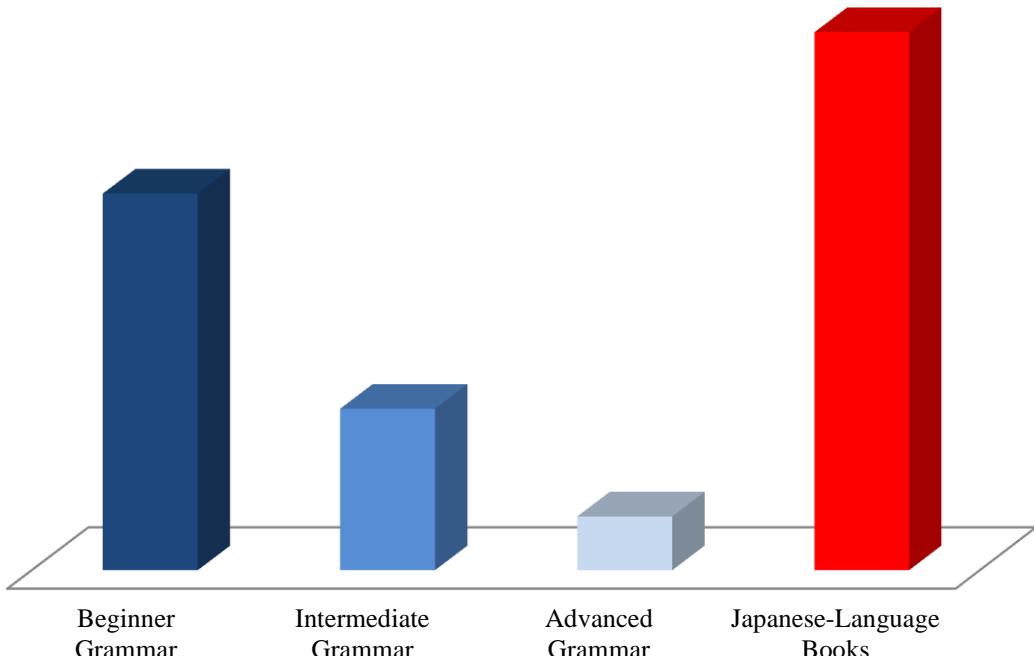
Maybe some of you guys out there get grammar pains, too. I feel you, man. Grammar can be so boring. Luckily, though, if you approach it through a well-structured, interesting resource, then it's not so bad. So let's talk about our options.

**All you've got to do for grammar in Phase #1 is pick out which grammar study tool you're going to use in Phase #3.** So this will only take a few minutes to complete. Yeah!

Now, there are a ton of great grammar resources for Japanese. After all, grammar is straightforward. Yeah, sometimes it's a little bit backwards for what we English speakers are used to, but it's at least clear cut. And it's well-suited for books.

My preferred approach is to pick out a course for my grammar studies before beginning. This is mainly because so many Japanese grammar book series have only one volume. In other words, they always end before you can progress to an advanced level. Good, advanced Japanese grammar books are hard to come by. I'm guessing it must be because so many of us foreigners start learning Japanese, but we rarely progress to anything vaguely resembling an advanced skill level... without studying in Japan or majoring in Japanese at a 4-year university. And even that fails sometimes. My experience leads me to believe the array of grammar resources is something like this:

## Number of Awesome Books



It probably won't get too advanced, but we want a grammar series with *at least* two volumes. The options aren't that extensive, but here are a few I've come across...

### *Ninja Tool #10 – Bunpou Books*

ぶんぽう  
Bunpou = 文法 = 文 (sentence) + 法 (method) = the method of sentences = grammar!

### *JapanesePod101 PDFs*

Ok, so Bunpou Book #1 isn't a book at all. The thing I love about the PDFs [JapanesePod101](#) publishes is that they get super advanced. It makes sense: they have a PDF for every audio lesson, and they have hundreds and hundreds of audio lessons... which means hundreds and hundreds of grammar study PDFs. Each one has a transcript of the audio in kanji, kana, formal Romanization, and English, plus vocabulary lists, example sentences, grammar explanations, and references for further study.

Here are a handful of (shrunken) images taken from a lesson PDF of theirs:

Kanji

下山 新 (アメの音)  
店員  
下山 新  
待ち合わせなんです けど。  
あ、いいい。遅れ ごめん。歩。  
金曜日から 出張で忙しくて。  
遅井 歩  
この前 校園に行けなくて、ごめんね。  
なんていいう校園を みたの。  
遅井 歩  
・・・「人違い」という校園を みたの。  
・・・体調はよくなかったの。  
下山 新  
ああ、よくなかったよ。  
遅井 歩  
どういう意味?  
下山 新  
ねえ、・・・「美雨」という人は 誰? 奥さん?  
下山 新  
は?  
遅井 歩  
私、見たの。

2

Kana

しもやま しん ろくじに えきまえの「ツインズ」というカフェに 来てほしい。  
(アメの音)  
てんいん いらっしゃいまーす。  
しもやま しん おちあわせなんです けど。  
あ、いいい。おくれて ごめん、あゆむ。  
さんようびから しゅっちょうで、いそがしくて。  
とおい あゆむ しちやま しん このまえ えいがに いけなくて、ごめんね。  
なんていいうえいがを みたの。  
とおい あゆむ しちやま しん ・・・「ひとちがい」という えいがを みたの。  
・・・たしかに よくなかったの。  
しもやま しん ああ、よくなかったよ。  
とおい あゆむ ・・・ほんとうに びょうきだったの?  
しもやま しん どういらいみ?  
とおい あゆむ ねえ、・・・「みう」という ひとは だれ? おくさん?

3

しもやま しん は?  
とおい あゆむ わたし、みたの。

Formal Romanization

Shinoyama Shin Roku-ji ni eki-mae no "tsuinzu" to iu kafe ni kite hoshii.  
(dog no oto) Ten-in Iresshainasse.  
Shinoyama Shin Machiawase nandesu kedo.  
A, itsu ita. Okurete gomen, Ayumu.  
Kinyōhi koto shachō de, isogashikute.  
Toi Ayumu ...  
Shinoyama Shin Kao mae eiga ni ikenakute, gomen ne.  
Nantoku eiga o mita no.  
Toi Ayumu ... "Hitochigai" to iu eiga o mita no.  
... Taichi wa yokonatta no.  
Shinoyama Shin A, yokonatta yo.  
Toi Ayumu ... Honto ni hyōki datta no?  
Shinoyama Shin No... "Mi" to iu hito wa dare? Okusan?  
Toi Ayumu Watashi, mitsa no.

English

Shin Shinoyama I want you to come to the cafe called Twins in front of the station at six.  
[door opens] Welcome!  
Shin Shinoyama I'm meeting someone here...  
Oh, there she is! Sorry I'm late.  
I've been busy since there's a business trip on Friday.  
Ayumu Toi ...  
Shin Shinoyama I'm sorry I couldn't go to the movies the other day.  
What was the movie you saw called?  
Ayumu Toi I saw a movie called "Mistaken Identity."  
...Are you feeling all better now?

4

Vocabulary

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English
カフェ	kafe	café	
待ち合わせ	machiawase	machiawase	appointment, rendezvous
遅れる	okureru	to be late; V2	
出張	shucchō	business trip	
この前	kono mae	the other day, last time, recently	
映画	eiga	movie, film	
人違い	hito-chigai	mistaking one person for another, mistaken identity	
本当に	hontō ni	really, truly; Adv.	
奥さん	okusan	wife	
誰	dare	who	

Vocabulary Sample Sentences

私はよくカフェで本を読む。  
Watashi wa yoku kafe de hon o yomu.  
ハチ公は有名な待ち合わせ場所です。  
Hachikō wa yūmeina machiawase basho desu.  
遅れですみません。  
Okurete sumimasen.  
出張ですか。  
Shucchō desu ka.  
この前アメリカに行きました。  
Kono mae amerika ni ikimashita.

I often read books at a café.  
The statue of Hachiko is a famous meetup place.  
I'm sorry I'm late.  
Are you here on business?  
I recently went to America.

## Grammar Points

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The Focus of This Lesson Is How to Introduce the Name of Something or Someone.

「人違い」という映画を みたの。

“Hitochigai” to iu eiga o mita no.

“I saw a movie called ‘Mistaken Identity.’”

---

In this lesson, you'll learn how to introduce the name of a noun using the phrase to iu, meaning “called” or “named.” For example, you'll learn how to say “a website called JapanesePod101.com” or “a person called Peter.” You'll also learn how to make an informal question.

5

A という B [A to iu B] = “a B called A”

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The phrase to iu (という) is the combination of the quotation-marking particle to and the verb iu, meaning “to say.”

### Reference

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7

Please also review the following grammar points.

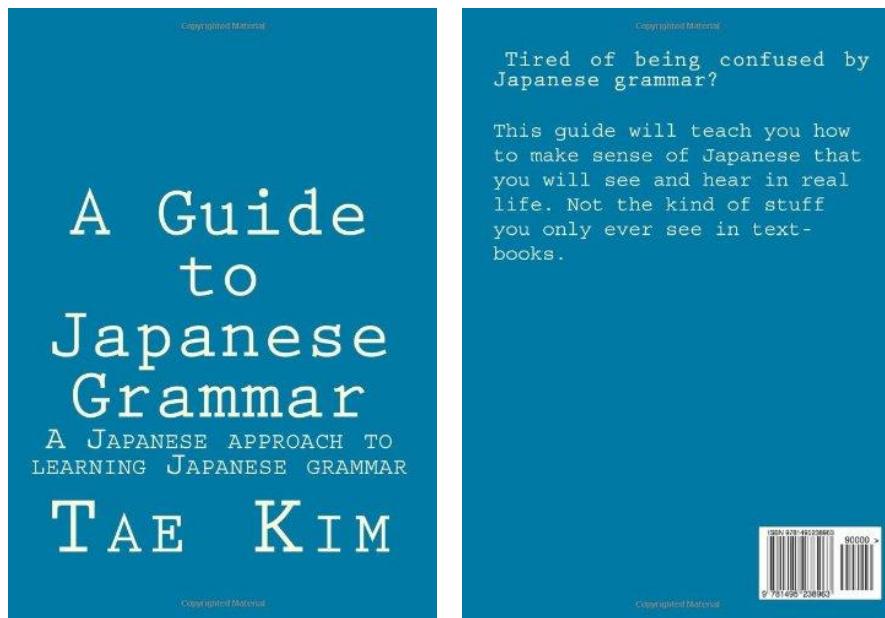
- [verb] + te hoshii ⇒ Beginner Series Season 5 Lesson 6
- n desu kedo ⇒ Beginner Series Season 5 Lesson 4
- [te-form + apology] ⇒ Beginner Series Season 4 Lesson 48
- Verb conjugation; potential form ⇒ Beginner Series Season 4 Lessons 43, 44, 45
- [adverbial form of adjective]+naru ⇒ Beginner Series Season 4 Lessons 47, 48

My main issue with using [JapanesePod101](#) as a grammar study tool is probably the lack of concise, attached practice material (which is useful for when taking lessons with a teacher). I think that this makes it, perhaps, a better grammar *self-study tool* once you've already completed a couple of standard grammar textbooks, the kind with workbooks and example after example. The next recommended grammar tool is also more of a self-study tool than it is a practice tool...

### [Tae Kim's Guide to Japanese Grammar](#)

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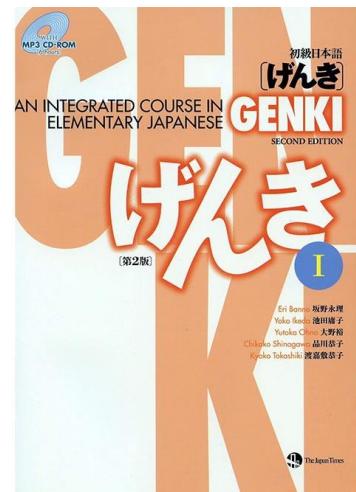
In all honesty, I haven't read all of Tae Kim's [A Guide to Japanese Grammar](#), but I've heard so many good things that I thought I would list it here as a grammar resource.



This behemoth grammar guide (over 450 pages!) is meant to teach you Japanese “as it’s really spoken,” as opposed to the over-polite Japanese that most grammar books stick you with for the first one or two volumes of study. Tae Kim does a really awesome job of explaining Japanese grammar, which can be horribly complicated if you have the wrong teacher. **The best part? It’s free.** The entire thing is [available online](#) for no cost. Or, you can buy a printed version via Amazon.

### *The Genki Series*

Genki has a special place in my heart. This one’s pure nostalgia. It was my first encounter with the Japanese language. I kept my workbooks for a very long time. Looking through them, you could sense the thrill with which I was filling in the answer to each question. Every answer written out completely, each character so neat, each stroke made with care, caution. I was opening the gates to a new world, a world where I sit for five minutes contemplating the history of the word ‘teaspoon,’ because Japanese



has a word for teaspoon that has the character for tea (茶) in it! What does tea have to do with a teaspoon? And how did it cross all those miles to mean that for such geographically distant people?!

\* \* \*

A man finds a wallet on the ground.

8 しらないひと：これは だれの さいふですか。

Shiranai hito Kore wa dare no saifu desu ka.

9 メアリー：

Mearii watashi no saifu desu.

アリガトウ ございます。

Arigatoo gozaimasu.



② After shopping, Mary goes to a restaurant. [K02-03/04]

1 ウエートレス：いらっしゃいませ。メニューを どうぞ。

Ueetoresu Irasshaimase. Menyuu o doozo.

2 メアリー：

Mearii doomo. Kore wa nan desu ka.

Ok, I'll stop. If you're reading this, you're probably already plenty fascinated by Japanese.

If you do decide to go with the Genki series, you'll be looking at these books:

1. [Genki I: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese](#)

A) [Genki I Workbook](#)

B) [Genki I Answer Key](#)

2. [Genki II: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese](#)

A) [Genki II Workbook](#)

Take a look at some reviews. Or better, flip through them at a college bookstore (they probably won't have these textbooks at a regular bookstore, unless you're in Japan). Compare them with some other grammar books. Maybe compare them with...

## The Minna No Nihongo Series



When I first used *Minna no Nihongo*, I thought it sucked. I was at an international Japanese language academy in Tokyo, and there was no English in the books! But then I came across the English versions of *Minna no Nihongo*, and they actually looked pretty helpful. Add to that the fact that the books were completely redone a couple of years ago. Supposedly, a lot of Japanese teachers were complaining about a lot of the language not being appropriate or relevant for students. I've heard that things are much better with version two.

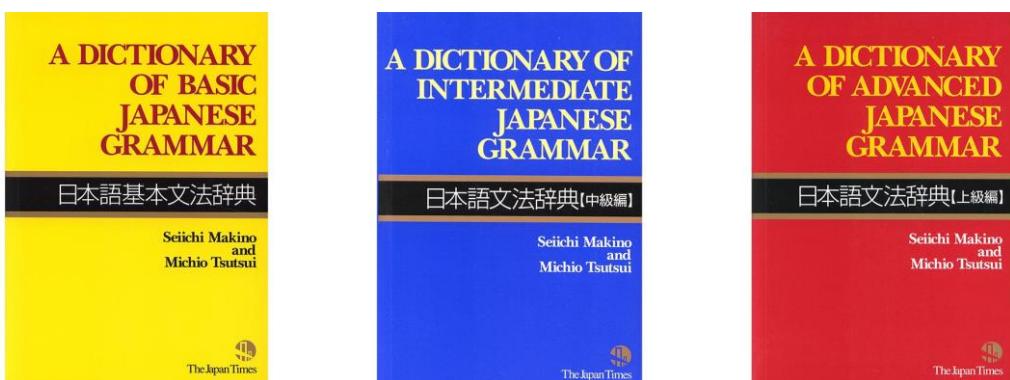
(By the way, if you're planning on studying at a Japanese language school in Japan, I would bet money that they're using these books. If you're studying at a school in the US, I think you're more likely to run into the *Genki* series. Really, though, it's all up to your teacher, I suppose.)

Take a look:

1. [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1 \(Beginner\) Second Edition – Complete Set](#)

- Included in this special set are:
  - ① [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1 Honsatsu](#)
  - ② [Translation & Grammatical Notes](#)
  - ③ [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1 Second Edition Hyojun Mondai-shu \(Workbook\)](#)
  - ④ [Minna no Nihongo Sentence Pattern Workbook 1 - Second Edition](#)
  - ⑤ [Minna no Nihongo Kanji Workbook 1 - Second Edition](#)
- 2. Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 (Beginner) Second Edition
  - ① [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Honsatsu](#)
  - ② [Translation & Grammatical Notes for Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Second Edition English \(available in 6 languages\)](#)
  - ③ [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Second Edition Hyojun Mondai-shu \(Workbook\)](#)
  - ④ [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Sentence Pattern Workbook - Second Edition](#)

### *Dictionary of Japanese Grammar Series*



I would put these in the reference section, but really they are a supplement to the grammar study curriculum you choose. Since we don't have a classroom, we'll often need a different way of explaining a grammar concept in order for us to understand it, and these books are really useful for that, thanks to their ordered, detailed indexes.

**Warning:** If you're still a beginner, do not use these books as a grammar study course. These books are meant to be used as references. Only crazy people with too much time to study read these books from cover to cover (in other words, me). But you might want to go ahead and get them, if you can find them, because it's great to be able to look up a grammar item you've come across, which all other grammar books are really bad for.

I'm a grammar nerd, so I love these books. They're pretty much my favorite books in the world.

- ✧ [A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar](#)
- ✧ [A Dictionary of Intermediate Japanese Grammar](#)
- ✧ [A Dictionary of Advanced Japanese Grammar](#)

### *Books You Should NOT Use*

This mastery plan is all about saving time, and there are a lot of grammar books that will cost you more time than you need to spend. That's why I recommend starting with a grammar book *series*. If it only has one volume, if they sell it at Barnes and Noble or another major chain, if it has a fun twist (e.g. learn grammar by reading manga), then be very careful. These books may teach you some useful stuff, but you'll probably end up restudying that same stuff when you're forced to switch to a different grammar book series, one that progresses to intermediate and advanced levels.

### *So... what book series should I choose?*

Honestly, it doesn't really matter, if you ask me. All of the resources that I've listed here are packed with practical grammar instruction that you will need in order to communicate in Japanese. So, really, any of these are probably okay. Take a look at each one, read reviews, then make your own decision. **The most important thing, as always, is that you don't quit studying right after you start.** So pick whichever one seems most interesting to you.

Don't take too much time deciding, though, because that's all that's left to do before moving on to the very last section of Phase #1!

## Phase #1 Progress:

- ✓ Mindset Prep
- ✓ Vocab Prep
- ✓ Listening Prep
- ✓ Reference Prep
- ✓ Grammar Prep
- Speaking Prep

## Speaking Prep

---



Hang in there, because Phase #1 only has one more prep left: Speaking Prep!

When I wrote my first-ever guide to learning Japanese, I didn't include a Speaking Prep section. If I'm going to be perfectly honest, I did not give nearly enough attention to my speaking ability when I was at a low level of Japanese. As a result, my comprehension of Japanese was always much, much higher than my output ability.

However, I am still of the opinion that **comprehension is always more important than output ability**. One thing that I always found strange about websites and blog posts about learning languages is that they put so much focus on output. I suppose that this is to compensate for formal education, which tends to stack too much emphasis on input

(according to many). I'm not sure that I totally agree with either viewpoint.

If you look at any well-established language school or university program, they will pretty much always say that they focus on the four pillars of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. There's a reason that they teach all four of those—they are the skills that you need to function in a world that only uses that language. (Small note: Typing and texting qualify as “writing,” too. I think learning to handwrite Japanese is a major waste of time, which I'll talk about later.) A person who is truly proficient in Japanese will have all of those skills, won't they? So let's just obtain all of those skills.

I like focusing on comprehension more, because I think that understanding what is going on around me will always be more important than accurately being able to express what I want to say. Not only that, but having super advanced comprehension is an awesome springboard into awesome output ability, because **90% of participating in conversations is being able to follow conversations**. But what works for me may not be what works for you. Focus on whatever you want, but put in a long-term, consistent effort, and you will get the comparable results.

I think that a big mistake people make is equating output ability with speaking skills, which I think is not at all accurate. Output is being able to say things, but speaking skills are more all-encompassing, and **speaking practice can be used to hone your overall knowledge of the language**. Using grammar will help you remember grammar. Using new vocabulary will help you remember new vocabulary. And, perhaps most importantly, interacting with native speakers of Japanese will motivate you to keep studying, even when you feel like you want to quit.

In this section, I will list three Ninja Tools. Really, though, they are just gateways to speaking Japanese. **The key is getting yourself into a situation where you can challenge yourself with some messed up, ugly Japanese as soon as possible**. It can be so frightening to dive into Japanese conversations when you're still at a low level, and that's why it is very tempting to put off this stage until later.

The fact is, though, that you will never be “ready” to have a conversation in Japanese. You could just open up one of the dictionaries that I mentioned earlier, log into an online

lesson, and go for it. That would be awesome! But if you need a little tiny tool belt before you do that, then maybe consider...

### *Ninja Tool #11 – Caveman Japanese Course*

This course is actually my own pride and joy, and I offer it as a supplement to this e-book. This book that you're reading is about *how to learn* Japanese, whereas the Caveman Course is about Japanese itself. Specifically, the goal is to study the Caveman Course for one week (or less) so that you can start having (extremely simplified) Japanese conversations right from the start.



Another way to think about it is that **Ninja Tool #10 (Caveman Japanese Course) is designed to give you the confidence and motivation to dive into Ninja Tools #11-12, which will put you into speaking situations.**

Japanese is actually quite a simple language. And if you tap into just how simple it is, you can communicate just about anything you want (as long as you have a dictionary in hand). My goal with this course is to create an extremely easy way to do this very quickly.

The course is attached [to the end of this guide](#), so you don't have to go looking for it at all. You already have it! Ninja Tool #10 ゲット！

Read it and review it for a week or so while you build up the courage to pick up the next two ninja tools.

## Ninja Tool #12 – Online Japanese Lessons



(Me getting used to online lessons.)

It took me such a long time to come around to accepting that **online lessons are better than in-person lessons**. Something about being human, when I practice a language I want to be in the same room as my teacher. Thanks to this, I put off studying (and teaching) online for a long time.

But, alas, I have seen the light.

I know what 87% of you are thinking: That's cool for you, Niko. But as for me, well, blah blah blah I don't wanna do online lessons.

Well I say to you, dear friend: If I can convince my parents to go to Thai food, then I have a pretty good chance of getting you to seriously consider online lessons.

### Reasons that online lessons are better than in-person lessons:

- ✧ **Accessibility:** You don't have to go all the way to Japan! You can build boss ninja skills while sitting in your living room.

- ✧ **Affordability:** Not sure if you guys have noticed, but language schools are expensive. And they're even more expensive if you start taking into account the level of attention and practice you're actually getting (or not getting) in a group class. With online lessons, you get your language teacher's full attention. In-person lessons can also cost a lot in opportunity costs. For example, if you have to quit your job or not work for a few months in order to study abroad in Japan, then really you're paying the lesson and travel fees, plus the money you would have made if you'd kept your job. Conversely, online Japanese teachers tend to be really cheap. I think it's because they're excited to use their English while explaining Japanese to low-level students. However, others seem just genuinely interested in sharing their language and culture with others. Maybe that's why there are so many volunteer Japanese teachers available in Japan.
- ✧ **Online dictionaries:** You can look up words in online dictionaries while you're talking to your teacher, without interrupting the flow of the lesson. If you're really nervous, just try Google Translate or something. Yeah, the translation will be super awkward and full of mistakes, but it's your teacher's job to fix and explain that stuff anyways.
- ✧ **Written clarification:** You can have your teacher write down words that you can't catch so that you can study them later.
- ✧ **Live-action proofreading:** You can both write on online documents using Google Docs, Microsoft OneDrive, etc., simultaneously. For example, you could practice writing, and your teacher could write corrections *as you're writing*. So, the second you're finished, you get instant feedback.
- ✧ **Recording tools:** You can automatically record the audio from your lessons using tools [like this one](#), and then you can listen to them over and over again as review. I've read that some teachers even do screen sharing using tools like [WebEx](#), then send videos after. (I've never tried it though, because it costs money.)
- ✧ **Fewer excuses:** It's difficult to make excuses for flaking on online lessons. Rei and I experienced this when we took lessons in Bangkok in Fall 2014. She was studying English, and I was practicing translation with a Japanese teacher. We always made excuses to skip classes. It's raining. I'm tired. The school's so far away. I don't feel like taking a shower. I don't have enough time to go all the way to school and back today. Excuses, excuses. With online lessons, all you have to do is turn on your computer. You don't even need to turn on your webcam if you don't feel like taking a

shower.

- ❖ **Comfort:** Taking a language lesson is scary. You feel insecure about your low level, uncomfortable that you can't communicate, all-around stressed! But it's not quite as scary if you're doing it from the comfort of your own home. You might even want to turn off your webcam, so that you can see your teacher, but they can't see you. I don't know why, but there's something about that combo that makes everything a little less intimidating.
- ❖ **Quality:** I have some experience teaching English both in-person for a company and online as a freelancer. I can say quite unequivocally that my online lessons are both cheaper and higher quality than the lessons I gave at language schools. At language schools, I had very little control over the lesson structure, because I had to adhere to the company's standards. Similarly, I could not provide my own materials. Whereas with online lessons, I choose and develop materials that are custom-tailored to my students' levels, goals, and interests. There is a lot of responsibility that comes with being someone's personal language coach. You have a vested interest in their success. And it causes you to go above and beyond.

By the way, my parents love Thai food now. And maybe—just maybe—you're a bit curious about taking online lessons.

Later in Phase #3, I'll go into details about how to prepare for your first online lesson, choose your teacher, and all of that good stuff. For now, though, all you need to do is browse your options, which are...

[italki](#)



[italki](#) is quickly establishing itself as *the* online language school. They have about 25 billion students signed up online now.

Okay, maybe not that many. But look at all this social clout:



Is this real life?!

And look at this sleek homepage:

The homepage of italki.com. At the top, the italki logo is on the left, followed by a language selection dropdown set to 'English'. To the right are links for 'WHAT IS ITALKI', 'HOW IT WORKS', 'Sign Up' (in a pink box), and 'Sign In' (in an orange box). The main headline 'Become Fluent in Any Language' is prominently displayed in large, bold, black text. Below it, a sub-headline reads 'Find an online teacher for personal language lessons'. To the right of the text is a video player showing a person on a laptop screen, with a play button overlaid. At the bottom left is a login section with 'Login with Facebook' and 'Sign Up with Email' buttons.

Anyways, yeah, it's a pretty viable option if you're looking to take online lessons. As of this moment, they appear to have around 20 professional Japanese teachers and around 50 community tutors:

## Professional Teacher - Japanese

22 Professional Teachers and 54 Community Tutors are teaching Japanese.



● **JapaneseTutor** Professional Teacher ★★★★★

Japan | Teaches Japanese | Sessions: 2870

Languages: Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Russian

学生、会社員、社長さん、お医者さん、歌手、スポーツ選手など、様々な  
職種の生徒がいます。日常会話やビジネス会話の練習から、政治や経済  
の話、日本語の試験、日本の大学入試準備、会社の面接練習などを教え  
ることができます。

Business Test Preparation JLPT EJU

◀ Video Introduction View time schedule Add to Favorites

Hourly Rate  
150 - 200 ITC  
≈ 15.0 - 20.0 USD  
30 MINUTE TRIAL  
80 ITC



● **Akari** Professional Teacher ★★★★★

Japan | Teaches Japanese, English | Sessions: 140

Languages: Japanese, English, French, Greek, Spanish

Hello everyone! Now I'm living in Canada. (From Jan 2015, I'm  
visiting Japan) I've traveled over fifteen countries. I'm familiar  
with Japanese culture and people's way of thinking.

Beginners Children Teenagers Business Test Preparation  
IELTS TOEFL TOEIC JLPT

◀ Video Introduction View time schedule Add to Favorites

Hourly Rate  
200 ITC  
≈ 20.0 USD  
30 MINUTE TRIAL  
120 ITC

From what I saw scrolling through their teachers, the average hourly rate for a lesson with a professional teacher is between \$10-20. Pretty cheap, if you ask me. I charge like \$25-30 for English lessons.

The cool thing about [italki](#) though is that there are so many community tutors, and the Japanese ones hardly charge any money at all. I found a bunch of teachers who are charging like \$6-7 an hour! Say what!!!

I don't teach on [italki](#), though. I teach on this next school, because they have a lot of Japanese students (and speaking Japanese gives me a pretty solid edge over most other teachers)...



Cafetalk is an online school that mostly caters to Japanese students of English. You can see that their homepage looks a lot like italki:

Let the world spice up your life

FIND GREAT LESSONS IN LANGUAGES,  
MUSIC AND OTHER INTERESTS!

Online lessons with Cafetalk

Join Now! Learn More ▾

or Want to teach?

29,970 Students

4,978 Lessons Offered

582 Available Tutors

24,566 Student Feedback

Cafetalk is just ever so slightly more money than most lessons on italki, and I think that there are two reasons for this: (1) They take a larger cut from teachers' lessons and (2) Teachers work very hard to provide interesting, unique lessons.

The rad thing about Cafetalk, though, is that their company is growing rapidly *in Japan*. This means that there is a huge influx of Japanese teachers. Right now they have just over 100. This is a significant number, considering that this company is much smaller than italki. Here are some examples of teachers they have:



**Yoshinori**

From:  In: 

Teaching:  

**RECOMMENDED**

For those who are learning Japanese (Beginners) I offer: "Japanese Grammar Q&A" and "Japanese Transcription Servic... [Read more](#)

	147
	22
	Yes

**Available Times**

Mon 23:00 – Tue 12:00  
 Tue 23:00 – Wed 12:00  
 Wed 23:00 – Thu 12:00  
 Thu 23:00 – Fri 12:00  
 Fri 23:00 – Sat 12:00  
 ...  
[more](#)



**MISA**

From:  In: 

Teaching: 

Hi! Nice to meet you. I'm MISA. Please call me MISA. I'm Japanese and I love Japan most than anyone! LoL! My other work is... [Read more](#)

	88
	41
	Yes

**Available Times**

Mon 08:00 – 15:00  
 Wed 08:00 – 21:00  
 Thu 14:00 – 23:30  
 Fri 08:00 – 17:00  
 Sat 06:00 – 07:30  
 ...  
[more](#)

The main way to browse [Cafetalk](#) is by lessons (as opposed to by tutors). Here are a handful of samples from the 400+ lessons available:



**JLPT N1 Lesson**

These lessons are for people who are aiming to pass JLPT N1. I recommend tak...

 Japanese |  50 Mins  3,000 Pts

 Has Trial: 10 min 200 Pts |  Skype Lesson |  Yamane

[Details](#)



**Japanese Grammar Lesson for Intermediate**

For people who can speak conversational Japanese but want to learn more expr...

 Japanese |  50 Mins  900 Pts

 Skype Lesson |  Umi

[Details](#)



**Japanese Grammar Lesson for Beginner**

We will choose 5 or 6 grammar points to go over during each lesson and learn ...

 Japanese |  50 Mins  900 Pts

 Skype Lesson |  Umi

[Details](#)



## Reading Columns and Web News Written in Japanese

Let's try to read Japanese!日本語のコラムやニュースを読もう！

 Japanese |  40 Mins  900 Pts

 Skype Lesson |  Emi H

[Details →](#)



## Learn Japanese Through the News (Advanced)

Listening! Reading! Comprehension! Speaking!

 Japanese |  40 Mins  1,500 Pts

 Has Trial: 20 min 500 Pts |  Skype Lesson |  Kayo I

[Details →](#)



## JLPT Lesson N1~N5

We will practice kanji, vocabulary, grammar, reading, and listening

 Japanese |  30 Mins  700 Pts

 Has Trial: 25 min 500 Pts |  Skype Lesson |  Juri sensei

[Details →](#)



## Japanese Free Talking for Intermediate and Advanced

Talk about Japan, your home country, or anything you want! Let's have a fun an...

 Japanese |  50 Mins  800 Pts

 Skype Lesson |  Umi

[Details →](#)



## Reading Japanese Novels for Beginners

Let's read a Japanese novels! We can start from an easy short novel.

 Japanese |  50 Mins  1,600 Pts

 Has Trial: 30 min 500 Pts |  Skype Lesson |  mumusuke

[Details →](#)



## Japanese Conversation

Talk and talk and improve your Japanese!

 Japanese |  25 Mins  400 Pts

 Skype Lesson |  Sets

[Details →](#)

Don't you get kind of excited just looking at all that learning goodness? Or is that just nerds like me? And some of them are under \$10 an hour! Boss!

Personally, [Cafetalk](#) has always appealed to me more. But really, just go with whatever

feels good to you. Find a type of lesson that you enjoy. Find a teacher that you look forward to meeting every week. And enjoy this rad journey.

### *Ninja Tool #13 – Online Language Exchanges*



Some of you might be thinking that those online schools, though cheap, are still too much money for your pitiful financial situation.

I feel you, man. Believe me, I feel you.

But if you're using "No Money" as your reason for not improving your speaking skills, you're just making excuses. Because **you can improve your speaking skills for free**. For instance, by using...



[MyLanguageExchange.com](http://MyLanguageExchange.com) has this super old school website:

The screenshot shows the homepage of MyLanguageExchange.com. At the top right, it says "Welcome, Guest! - Sign up" and "Member Log In". The main header features a yellow speech bubble with the text "MyLanguageExchange.com". Below the header, there's a banner stating "practicing over 115 languages!" with a globe icon. The page is in English, with language links for Français, English, Español, Deutsch, and other international versions. The main content area is titled "Your Language Exchange Online Community" and claims "Over 1 million members from over 133 countries, practicing 115 languages!". It includes sections for "New Users" (with links to "What is a language exchange?", "Why do a language exchange?", "How to do a language exchange?", "Learn more about this site", and "Sign up as a member - it's free!"), "Features" (with links to "Penpals International penpals for exchange of language and culture", "Group Homestay Exchange", "Language and cultural immersion with friends. Real, social, fun and safe!", "Edit Your Profile", "Members: view/edit your account", and "Email Inbox"), and "Describe Your Language Exchange Partner" (a search form for finding partners by native language, practicing language, country, and age). There are also several testimonial boxes, including one from Juan José Guerrero in Seville, Spain, and mentions of being featured in "YAHOO! INTERNET LIFE" and "The Wall Street Journal". The bottom of the page includes a "Testimonials" section with a quote from a user.

So you might be a bit skeptical. However, I have found that there is a pretty active community of Japanese people on the site. If you're living in Tokyo, it's actually an awesome way to meet new people and make friends.

If you're abroad, though, then you can still make some online friends. Then you can make a deal with them that you have a 1 hour Skype conversation per week: 30 minutes in English and 30 minutes in Japanese.

And if you're super motivated, you can get 7 of those friends, then shower in

げんごこうかん

言語交換 / *gengou koukan* / “language exchange.”

Oh yeah, there is a paid option for [MyLanguageExchange.com](http://MyLanguageExchange.com), too, but you can probably sneak by on the free version.

By the way, they also have a language exchange feature on [italki](#). So, you could just go on there and talk for free, too. Booms.

So, yeah, choose whichever avenue of speaking practice vibes with you and go for it.

Also, don't freak out too much, but... Speaking Prep フイニッショウ！！

### Phase #1 Progress:

- ✓ Mindset Prep
- ✓ Vocab Prep
- ✓ Listening Prep
- ✓ Reference Prep
- ✓ Grammar Prep
- ✓ Speaking Prep

### One Last Thing

Congratulations!

## NINJA DANCE PARTY CELEBRATION



Don't ever forget to congratulate yourself for each step of your journey to Nihongo mastery. You did something great when you decided to learn Japanese. You did something great when you got a hold of this book. And you did something great by reading all the way through Phase #1... which you just did!

That's right. Phase 1 complete! Well, you've still got to *do* the work laid out in Phase #1, but I'm happy to say that **you now know everything you're going to need to do in Week #1** in order to become a master of Japanese this year. Let's take a condensed look at your Phase #1 Goals:

## Phase #1 – Checklist (Week #1)

**Purpose:** Prepare Your Ninja Tools for Accelerated Japanese Learning

**Time to Complete:** 1 Week

### Mindset Prep:

- Cultivate a Growth Mindset (i.e., Have Faith in Your Success)
- Commit to Long-Term Study
- Mentally Prepare Yourself for Future Setbacks
- Pick Your Holy Habit Time
  - ❖ Identify the Cue, Routine, and Reward
- Conserve Willpower
- Identify Barriers to Consistent Studying and Systematically Eliminate Them
- Create an Accountability System (Optional)

### Vocab Prep:

- Download or Bookmark an App or Program for Learning Hiragana and Katakana (Ninja Tool #1)
- Download Anki (Ninja Tool #2)
- Purchase *Remembering the Kanji* (Optional) (Ninja Tool #3)
- Bookmark Reviewing the Kanji (Ninja Tool #4)

### Listening Prep

- Sign Up for JapanesePod101 (or Other Audio Lessons) (Ninja Tool #5)

### Reference Prep

- Set Up Your Computer to Read Japanese Characters (Ninja Tool #6)
- Bookmark Awesome Online Dictionaries (Ninja Tool #7)
- Install Awesome Web Browser Plugins (Ninja Tool #8)
- Download Awesome Smartphone Apps (Ninja Tool #9)

### Grammar Prep

- Choose and Purchase (Optional) Your Preferred Series of Grammar Books (Ninja Tool #10)

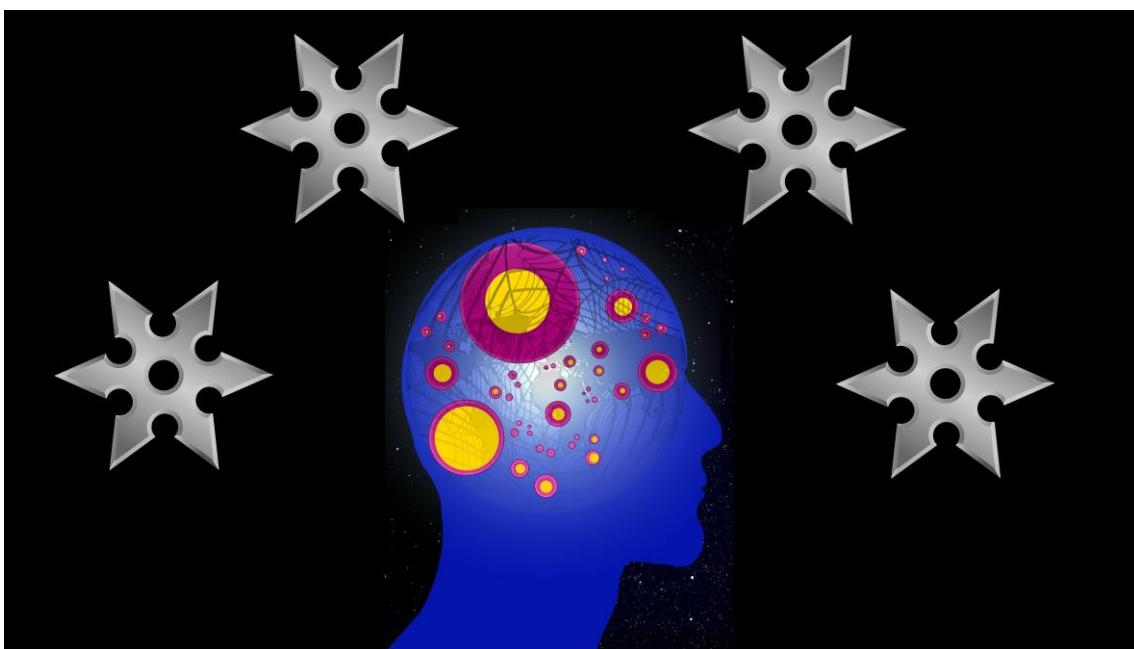
### Speaking Prep

- Download the Caveman Conversation Course (Included) (Ninja Tool #11)
- Create an Account for Taking Online Japanese Lessons (Ninja Tool #12)
- Create an Account for Japanese Language Exchange (Optional) (Ninja Tool #13)
- High Five Yourself

# PHASE #2 - PREP

## YOUR NINJA BRAIN

---



I should apologize in advance. The truth is, I am very hesitant to propose what I'm going to propose in Phase #2, because I'm worried that many readers will falter when faced with such a huge challenge.

Back when I studied Japanese at a language institute in Tokyo, it was pretty embarrassing to compare the average Western student (mostly Americans) with the majority of our student body (mostly Koreans and Chinese), because the Westerners were comparably inept at learning Japanese. I saw Westerner after Westerner fall behind in their courses, unable to keep up with their Asian counterparts—Chinese students who didn't need to study the kanji; Korean students that already spoke a language similar to Japanese.

It was a bit embarrassing, really.

Phase #2 is all about closing the advantage-gap that separates Asian students from

Westerners. In other words, **Phase #2 is about learning to decipher the Japanese Writing System.** This phase has three Ninja Brain Preps, which altogether should take you about 104 days to complete. For many it will take longer. For some incredibly motivated students, it may take less time.

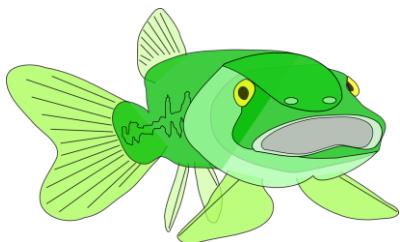
### **Phase #2 Goals:**

1. Learn to pronounce Japanese (Day #1)
2. Learn Hiragana and Katakana (Week #1)
3. Learn the meaning and writing of all 2,136 Joyo Kanji (Weeks #2-14)

You're probably looking at #3 and thinking that I'm crazy, but it really is possible if you follow this guide *diligently*. It's actually pretty simple to do so. Don't, however, confuse *simple* with *easy*—it's simple to exercise every day, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Anyways, here we go...

## Pronouncing Japanese

---



Back in Phase #1, I briefly talked about the pronunciation of Japanese. In general, I talked about how it's a pretty easy language to pronounce, and I said that you probably don't need to worry too much about this. However, you do hear a lot of Westerners speaking Japanese with a disgusting accent.

In the essence of full disclosure, I should tell you: **My pronunciation is not perfect.** I have heard recordings of myself where I'm speaking Japanese, and it's not always a pleasant experience. However, my pronunciation has improved a lot just from reading up on the common errors that foreigners make (and by hearing some truly brutal butchering of this often beautiful language).

### *Common Pronunciation Errors*

Here I'm going to list the pronunciation mistakes that I hear most often. However, it's not something that you need to worry about too much. Every now and then throughout your studies, you can come back and look at these and make sure that you're not making one of

these errors. If it stresses you out too much, just skim right over them and move onto the Brain Prep #1 details.

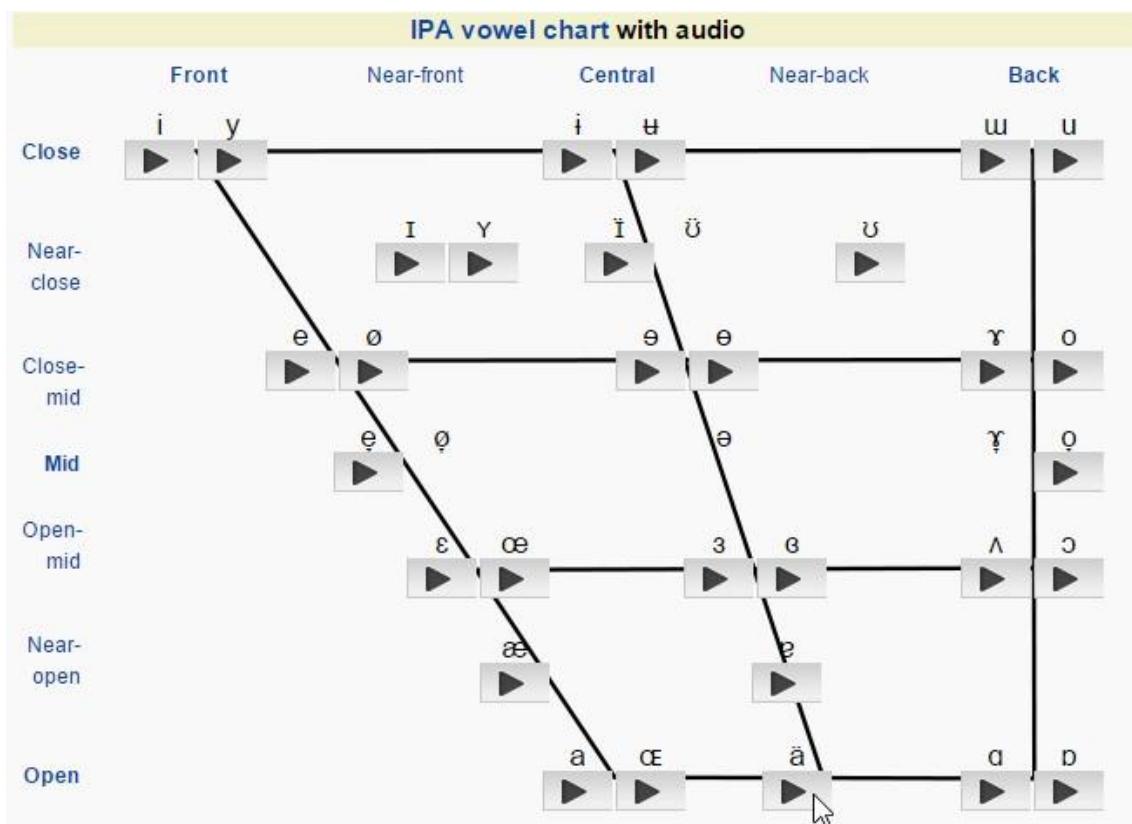
### Common Error #1 – The Gaijin “A”

This is the worst one, by far, that I hear gaijin making.

When people first learn how to pronounce Japanese, someone tells them, Oh, *ア* / a / is like the “a” in “father.” But there’s a huge problem with this explanation: The pronunciation of the English language is varied, messed up, and geographically inconsistent.

For example, I have a friend from Manchester, and the “a” in his pronunciation of “father” is closer to the “a” in my (Californian) pronunciation of “fat.”

Let’s take a look at a scary chart:



This chart is taken from [this page](#) on Wikipedia, and it’s showing the various vowel sounds that humans make. If you go to that page, then you can click on the various

vowel sounds in order to hear them. The one that my mouse is hovering over [ä] is much like the Japanese “a” sound. Around it, you’ll notice that there are like five different “a” sounds, so it might be a bit overwhelming, but you’ll get used to it if you just make a point of listening for the pronunciation of the Japanese “a” as you interact with native speakers throughout your studies.

You can also try cool things like shadowing, singing along to Japanese music, YouTube videos and pronunciation lessons.

### *Common Error #2 – The Gaijin “R”*

---

I’m pretty sure that at some point in my ignorant childhood I must have made fun of an Asian person for not clearly dividing up their L’s and R’s. And, who knows, maybe you have too.

If so, retribution is at hand.

Five years ago, when I went to a Japanese school in Tokyo, I remember that my class was practicing potential forms in Japanese, words like 食べられる <sup>た</sup> / *taberareru* / “to be able to eat.”

*Ta-be-ra-re-ru.* Look at all those R’s! So I said something like *Taberareru*, and my Japanese teacher mimicked my super-gaijin R’s, and everyone in the class laughed at me. Ouch. I suppose justice was served that day.

The reason that they were making fun of me is that when I first started studying Japanese, they always wrote the Japanese ら り る れ ろ as *ra-re-ru-re-ro*. But **the Japanese “R” sound is not the English “R” sound—it’s totally different.**

If you watch [this video by Tofugu](#), he’ll tell you that it’s more like 70% R, 20% L, and 10% D. Only, I can’t calculate percentages while I talk. (He actually explains it much better than that, by the way.) So I go look at Wikipedia, and I get this thrown at me:



*/r/ is an apical postalveolar flap undefined for laterality. That is, it is specified as neither a central nor a lateral flap, but may vary between the two.*

– [Japanese Phonology \(Wiki\)](#)

Awesome. Thanks for clearing that up, Wikipedia.

Or, if you’re like me, and you don’t understand a word that I’ve written so far, then you can just use my trick: Flap it.

Seriously, “flapping” is a real thing. I once read an academic article about [Flapping in North America](#). Flapping is that thing that (some) English speakers do when they come across a double “t” or “d” sound.

For example, most North Americans flap the double “t” sound in the word “butter.” So, it doesn’t sound like the “t” in “tea.”

Here’s another weird chart [from Wikipedia](#):

## IPA symbols [edit]

The flap and tap consonants identified by the International Phonetic Alphabet are:

IPA	Description	Example			
		Language	Orthography	IPA	Meaning
r̪	alveolar tap	North American English	latter	/lærə/	"latter"
ɿ	alveolar lateral flap	Japanese	ラーメン	/Ja:men/	"ramen"
t̪	retroflex flap	Warlpiri	dupa (?)	/t̪upa/	"windbreak"
v̪	labiodental flap	Karang		/v̪ara/	"animal"

Notice that the North American flap consonant is really similar to the Japanese flap consonant. So, if you’re North American, then just make that double “t” sound whenever you need to make a Japanese “r” sound. I’ve been doing it for years now, and no one

laughs at me anymore.

If you're from the UK or some other place where they don't flap it, then I have no idea what you should do. If you know, please [tell me!](#)

Also, if you think that all of this worrying about "L" and "R" is simply not worth your time and you want to be lazy, then I recommend opting for the "L" sound over the "R" sound, as you're less likely to get criticized for it.

### *Common Error #3 – Intonation & the Deadly Pitch Accent*

---

Have you ever seen the movie 『雲の向こう、約束の場所』 / *Kumo no Mukou, Yakusoku no Basho* / "Beyond the Clouds, the Promised Place" / English title: *The Place Promised in Our Early Days*? In the opening scene of that movie (which I love, by the way), just after the violin starts playing, it cuts to a high school girl reading the poem "Morning of Final Farewell," by Miyazawa Kenji and it's just beautiful.

はげしいはげしい熱やあえぎのあひだから  
おまへはわたくしにたのんだのだ  
銀河や太陽、気圧などとよばれたせかいの  
そらからおちた雪のさいごのひとわんを……

*In between the oh-so violent fevers and gasping,  
You asked me to get  
The last bowl-ful of snow, descended from the skies,  
The realm of galaxies and suns and atmospheres...*

- 宮沢賢治、「永訣の朝」 / Miyazawa Kenji, "Morning of Final Farewell" ([Link to Poem](#) / [Link to Video Clip](#))

There are times when Japanese really does sound like music. A lot of Japanese people will complain to you that English is difficult, because it has stressed syllables, but they say that Japanese is flat, so it's easy. They are both correct and incorrect in saying so.

English uses a stress accent. Accentuated syllables are spoken louder and held for longer. English sentences are usually made up of content words and structure words. Content words are important, so they get the stress, whereas structure words are not important, so they get passed over. Consider this sentence:

Have you **read** that **new book** by **Stephen King**?

Most English speakers would put extra stress on those bold words. Or maybe everyone is talking about how they love that new book by Stephen King. Then I turn to you and I say:

Have **you** **read** that **new book** by **Stephen King**?

We can express a lot of meaning through stresses like this, and Japanese people often find it very difficult. For example, most students (unless they're quite advanced) would not catch the difference between those two sentences above.

Japanese doesn't use a stress accent. Instead, they have something called a pitch accent. This means that the pitch of someone's voice falls after they hit an accented syllable. Sounds confusing, right? Allow me to freak you out with yet another Wikipedia chart:

Romanization	Accent on first syllable		Accent on second syllable			Accentless			
<i>hashi</i>	/ha <sup>+</sup> si/ [háši]	箸	chopsticks	/hasi <sup>+</sup> / [háši]	橋	bridge	/hasi/ [háši]	端	edge
<i>hashi-ni</i>	/ha <sup>+</sup> sini/ [hášini]	箸に	at the chopsticks	/hasi <sup>+</sup> ni/ [hášini]	橋に	at the bridge	/hasini/ [hášini]	端に	at the edge
<i>ima</i>	/i <sup>+</sup> ma/ [imá]	今	now	/ima <sup>+</sup> / [imá]	居間	living room			
<i>kaki</i>	/ka <sup>+</sup> ki/ [káki]	牡蠣	oyster	/kaki <sup>+</sup> / [káki]	垣	fence	/kaki/ [káki]	柿	persimmon
<i>kaki-ni</i>	/ka <sup>+</sup> kini/ [kákini]	牡蠣に	at the oyster	/kaki <sup>+</sup> ni/ [kákini]	垣に	at the fence	/kakini/ [kákini]	柿に	at the persimmon
<i>sake</i>	/sa <sup>+</sup> ke/ [sáké]	鮭	salmon				/sake/ [sáké]	酒	alcohol, sake
<i>nihon</i>	/ni <sup>+</sup> hon/ [níhón]	二本	two sticks of	/nihón/ [níhón]	日本	Japan			

So if we look at the word はし / *ha-shi*, accenting the first syllable and then dropping the pitch for "shi" would mean "chopsticks," but if we start with a low "ha" and then

move up to a higher pitch for “shi,” then it could mean “bridge” or “edge.”

Are you freaking out yet? Don’t worry, because it’s not actually that bad.

I have never explicitly studied the pitches of individual words, and yet I’m highly proficient in Japanese. Also, Wikipedia assures me that “Recently, a study recording the electrical activity of the brain has shown that Japanese mainly use context, rather than pitch accent information, to contrast between words which differ only in pitch.”

So forget it! Right? Well, not exactly. Don’t worry about it, but at the same time don’t ignore it. I think that all you really need to know is:

- 1. Know that intonation and pitch accents exist in Japanese.**
- 2. Try to imitate the way native speakers talk.**

That should be plenty.

You could choose to hate the existence of a pitch accent. Or, instead, you could join my team and love the music it allows for. After all, the lack of a stress accent gives Japanese that melodic sound, the measured rises and falls, the rhythmic, flowing syllables of that high school girl’s voice as she reads out a poem, a story about another girl—one that, on her deathbed, is eating bowl-fuls of snow.

### *Ninja Brain Prep #1 – Learn to Pronounce Japanese*

So, Ninja Brain Prep #1 is going to be over in about five seconds, because all you have to do is read the few paragraphs written above, then pay attention to the sounds as you study from here on out, especially as you learn hiragana and katakana, which is the next thing we do in Phase #2.

### Ninja Brain Prep #1

(Estimated Time to Completion: 30 Minutes)

1. Read through the paragraphs above a few times.
2. Keep that information in mind as you proceed to Brain Prep #2.

## The Japanese Writing System

I very briefly talked about the writing system in Japanese back in Phase #1. In Phase #2, we will attempt to understand each of these writing systems so that they don't get in the way of our future studying. Specifically, we need to learn:

1. **Hiragana** (phonetic characters used for Japanese words)
  - ひらがな ← They have a more cursive style.
2. **Katakana** (phonetic characters used primarily for foreign loan words)
  - カタカナ ← They have a more angular style.
3. **Kanji** (characters that express meaning, adapted from Chinese)
  - 漢字 ← They have a more complex & ridiculous style.

Before I get into the practicalities of mastering these, there is something I'd like to bring up. Namely, I want to look at...

### *Why Japanese Has 3 Different Scripts*

When I took the JLPT N1 in Tokyo, I went into my assigned classroom at a small college campus near Shibuya station. I sat down at my desk and looked up towards the front of the classroom. For a few seconds I was so confused, as something like this was written on the board:

けいたいでんわのでんげんをきってください

That sentence ("Please switch off your mobile phones.") is written entirely in hiragana. I'm guessing that the test proctor thought that it would be easier for test takers to understand if there were not any kanji. More likely, he didn't think about anything at all and just followed the instructions he was given, which were for students of all levels.

Aside from the fact that I hadn't seen sentences in all hiragana in years, I think that this type of writing has always been a problem for me personally. This is how that sentence should actually look, in the version that includes kanji for every character:

携帯電話の電源を切って下さい。

That might seem overwhelming for those of you that are beginners, but it will become much easier than the all-hiragana version at some point in your studies. Also, the furigana version (when the readings of kanji are written on top of them) should be easier, too, once you've learned hiragana:

けいたいでんわ でんげん き くだ  
携帯電話の電源を切って下さい。

Japanese needs to have kanji, because it is vital for clarifying the meaning of written words. One example of this is homophones (words that sound the same). There are a ridiculous number of homophones in Japanese, and if everything were written in hiragana, then they would also become homonyms (words that are spelled the same), and no one would be able to understand anything.

For example, what if I had the following sentence, written in all hiragana:

きしやがはやい

If we're talking to someone, we'd probably understand the meaning of this sentence simply based on the context of the conversation. But sometimes when reading, there is no context. And that's why kanji can be a lifesaver.

We have two words in this sentence, connected by the particle が / *ga*:

1. きしや
2. はやい

きしや / *kisha* could mean either 記者 (‘reporter’) or 汽車 (‘steam-powered train’).

はやい / *hayai* could mean either 早い (‘early’) or 速い (‘fast’).

So now we have all of these possibilities:

記者が早い = “The reporter is *early*.”

記者が速い = “The reporter is *fast*.”

汽車が早い = “The *train* is *early*.”

汽車が速い = “The *train* is *fast*.”

Perhaps this is a bit of an extreme example, but I hope that it clarifies my point a bit. You might be worrying that this all sounds way too complicated, but it’s not anything you have to worry about. Instead, it’s something that you’ll get used to naturally from focused exposure to the language. And as for the subtle differences between some kanji, don’t fret about it. I have seen Japanese people mix up the kanji we just looked at, 早い and 速い on a number of occasions.

What this basically all comes down to is that **written Japanese is the result of smashing a foreign writing system onto a completely different spoken language**, and the results are, well, complicated. That said, studying this writing system, and the ways that it interacts with the language as a whole, can be a fascinating experience. It’s not something to be afraid of. Instead, it’s something to look at with enthusiasm and curiosity. We can get through this, I promise you.

Katakana, by the way, is basically just the same thing as hiragana, only it’s used for foreign loan words, (usually foreign) people’s names, and to add emphasis to words. So,

for instance, some words that would use katakana are the names of cities around the globe, things that were recently invented in countries other than Japan, your name, etc.

Also, if there are any language nerds out there like myself that want to read up on homophones in Japanese a bit more, I thought that [this article on KanjiClinic.com](http://KanjiClinic.com) was quite interesting was an interesting read.

### *Ninja Brain Prep #2 – Learn Hiragana & Katakana*

So remember in Phase #1 when I told you to pick an app or program for learning Hiragana and Katakana?

Well, it's time to bust it out and plow through all of those characters ASAP.

Your homework for Ninja Brain Prep #2 is simply this: Grab Ninja Tool #1 (app or program for learning hiragana and katakana *with accompanying audio for pronunciation practice*), then spend the next week using it whenever you have a free second to spare.

There are only 46 characters for hiragana and katakana, respectively. So, some can probably get through these within two or three days. Even if you're slacking a bit, I wouldn't take any longer than 1 week to complete this part of Phase #2.

## Ninja Brain Prep #1

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 30 Minutes)*

1. Read the [Pronouncing Japanese](#) section a few times.
2. Keep that information in mind as you proceed to Brain Prep #2.

## Ninja Brain Prep #2

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 1 Week)*

1. Get a free app or program for learning hiragana and katakana.
2. Learn the reading and pronunciation of every single character.
3. Learn to write the characters (recommended, but you don't really need to if you don't feel like it; personally, I *never* handwrite any Japanese).
4. Keep using your chosen app or program every single day until you know all of the characters like the back of your hand.

There are only 3 Brain Preps in Phase #2. So, in a way, you're kind of 2/3 finished. In a much more realistic way, though, we're just getting started. Ninja Brain Preps #1 & #2 only take about a week to get through, but Ninja Brain Prep #3 is going to take at least 3 months!

As we read through this next section, let's all resist the urge to throw this guide in the trash, scream at our loved ones, cry, etc...

### *Ninja Brain Prep #3 – Learn ALL 2,136 Jōyō Kanji*

If you really want to become fluent in Japanese, I absolutely recommend learning ALL of the 2,136 Jōyō Kanji before you seriously dive into your studies.

I have quite a few reasons why I recommend this...

#### **1) I made the mistake of NOT doing this, and it was horrible.**

I spent the first year of my Japanese studies lackadaisically studying kanji the way that everyone told me to study kanji: write each character a zillion times until it sticks in your brain. And, yeah, that was a huge disaster. So, after a year of studying, I knew a pretty

solid smattering of Japanese, but I only knew about 500 kanji, despite having studied the kanji *a lot*.

You might be thinking that 500 is a pretty solid amount, but with kanji it's kind of an all-or-nothing deal. Either you know them or you don't. Knowing only the most common kanji is certainly better than nothing, but if you can't read all the common-use characters, you're still illiterate. And being illiterate sucks.

After that year of studying Japanese without knowing the kanji, I quit studying Japanese completely. I didn't study Japanese at all for about a year after that. I left Japan and just resigned myself to failure. I thought *I can't do this. It's not possible for me.*

Then, about a year after that, I decided to try studying with a new system. Basically, I used a very rudimentary version of the system that I will walk you through in this book. It wasn't nearly as fine-tuned at that time, but I still managed to get drastically different results.

I started over, and **I learned all 2,136 of the Jōyō Kanji in about 90 days**. Not bad, right? But let's round up and say 100 days.

100 days.

It's hard to put time into perspective when studying a language. I think that maybe this is why so many of us get discouraged and quit studying somewhere along the line. We expect to learn everything overnight. When we google "how to learn Japanese" or "how to learn kanji" or "how to master Spanish," we always add words like *fast, easily, in 3 months*, whatever. I called my last e-book "How to Learn Japanese in 1 Year." But the thing is, **time frames are absolutely meaningless**. And I think that searching for accelerated methods for learning languages, though potentially beneficial, is often nothing more than a lack of commitment.

I mean, I get it. I'm human, too. I love instant gratification. Modern-day society has conditioned me to expect it everywhere I go. But **there is so much more satisfaction in achieving something that you really have to work for**. And I think that that's the type

of mindset that is conducive to making great achievements—not just in language-learning, but in life in general. Yes, we should take the fastest route to our destination. However, the fastest route may still take quite a long time, and that's okay.

What I'm trying to say is that 100 days is both a very long time and a very short time.

100 days is a long time, because we're talking about 100 days *in a row*. Stop and actually think about where you were about 3 months ago. Between then and now, how many times did you go to work? How many times did you talk on the phone? How many minutes or hours did you spend watching TV shows, playing video games, reading books, looking at Facebook, hanging out with your friends? How often did you feel tired? How often did you feel like you really, really, really didn't want to go to work? Because **we are talking about studying the kanji for *at least one hour* every single one of those days**. That's a long time!

On the other hand, if you take a step back, 100 days is nothing. I started studying Japanese over 1,000 days ago. If I had spent my first 100 days learning all of the kanji in the method described in this book, then I would be much better at the language today. If I had followed all of the advice in this guide, I would be able to destroy my current level of Japanese. Looking back, I see so much wasted effort. So much wasted time. But, whatever. Live and learn... and share what you've learned, yeah?

So in my guide we're shooting for about 100 days. Specifically, we're going to try to learn all of the 2,136 Joyo Kanji in 97 days. However, **you don't need to strictly follow the schedules and advice in this guide**. Go at your own pace. Decide what you like, what works for you. There are people that like to take the approach that I took: a painful 100-day intensive kanji study session. But if that doesn't work for you, then don't do it.

Do 10 new kanji a day and learn all of them in about 210 days or so.

Or do 5 new kanji a day and learn them in 420 days. That's only a little bit over a year. And 5 characters per day isn't too stressful. And if you miss a few days studying new kanji, it's not a big deal (because the study system allows for that).

Maybe you're thinking, over 400 days?! Forget it! I know that feeling. The thing is, though, that time is going to pass. 400 days will come and go, and at the end of them, you will either (A) know the kanji, or (B) not know the kanji. There is no gray area here. It is that simple. A or B. Your choice.

## **2) Knowing kanji makes you faster at learning Japanese.**

Once you know the kanji, you can often **know the meaning of words the first time you see them**, even without seeing their definition or English translation. Kanji make sense. Without them, Japanese is just a bunch of random sounds. And that makes it difficult to attach meaning to the pieces of the language.

Once you know kanji and their readings (which you'll learn naturally by studying vocabulary), you'll often be able to **know the meaning of a word just by hearing it**. I've done this many times. It's awesome.

Once you know kanji, it's **easier to ask Japanese people what words mean**. If you've ever studied a language, you may have noticed that most people are really, really bad at explaining what things mean. I used to be really bad at this in English before I started studying other languages and working as an English teacher. Because of this, in conversation with a Japanese person, sometimes if a new word comes up, and you ask them what it means, they'll look at you like a brain-dead Neanderthal. The reason for this is that explaining the meaning of words is difficult, especially when you're talking to non-native speakers.

With kanji, when you get the Neanderthal Stare, you can say: "What are the kanji?" Then the Japanese person tells you the kanji, and you automatically understand the meaning of the word. This doesn't always work. But it does work quite a bit. "What are the kanji?" is always the first question I ask when trying to learn the meaning of a new word that I've heard in a conversation.

## **3) If you learn all of the kanji at the beginning, the odds of you quitting Japanese decrease drastically.**

I'm always saying this, but *the most difficult part of learning any language is not quitting.*

If you study effectively and consistently without quitting, you will learn Japanese. Actually, you'll learn any language. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter if you're 'good' or 'bad' at languages. Scientific studies have shown that anyone, even old people, can learn a new language if they study consistently over time.

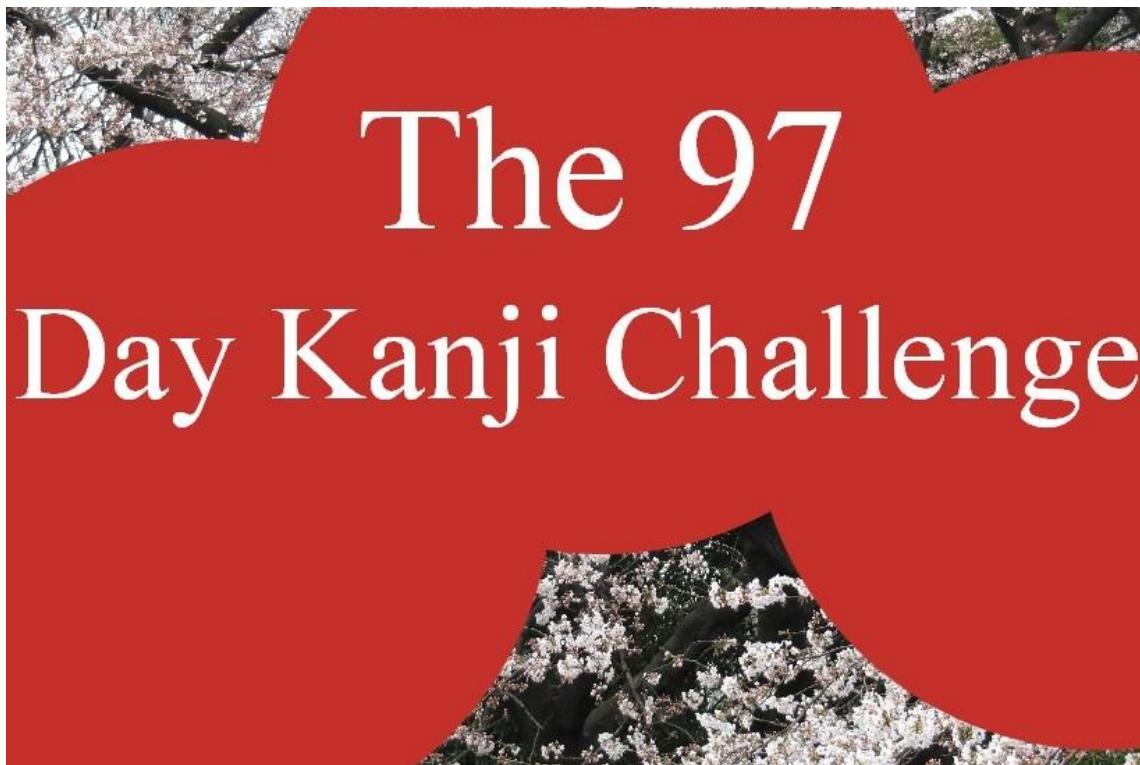
Not knowing kanji will make you feel like quitting Japanese. Therefore, it's hazardous to your overall success, and you should get it out of the way as quickly as possible.

#### **4) It's entirely feasible.**

While you read through the remainder of Phase #2, I'm hoping that you'll begin to realize something that is essential to completing this course: *It is entirely feasible to remember thousands of facts, numbers, symbols, etc. in a short amount of time if you use a systematic approach that utilizes your brain's amazing potential.*

Follow the instructions, and you will succeed. There is a simple process to all of this, and mental barriers are the biggest obstacle to overcome in your language-learning journey. Every setback that you may encounter along the way has already been encountered and overcome by someone else that came before you. So believe in yourself, and let's stick this thing out. I've got your back.

## The 97-Day Kanji Challenge (Version 2.0)



Studying Kanji is tricky business. Everyone seems to have an opinion on the best way to study the kanji fast. And, truth be told, there are a lot of good ways to study the kanji. But most of them can be pretty overwhelming, so it's easy to lose motivation and go in search of the mythical "easy, fast way to learn the kanji."

I won't mince words: Learning the kanji is one of the hardest things I've ever done. Not only that, but if you count the year that I spent trying and failing to learn the kanji, back before I started over with a basic version of this system, then it took me a lot longer than 97 days to learn them. It took me a lot longer, because I kept trying different study methods, never thinking that I was on the right track to learning all of the kanji.

However, I know many people, young and old, who have learned the kanji in under 97 days using highly similar methods to the one I am about to explain to you. Getting emails from people thanking me for helping them to learn the kanji is my favorite thing about running [NihongoShark.com](http://NihongoShark.com). This site just started as a hobby, and I probably would have shut it down if I didn't get one of those emails from time to time. And, getting those

emails, I started to feel that I could help people like that even more. I thought that I could create an even better system than the one described in [my original 2012 post](#) on how to learn the kanji.

I did a lot of research, and I asked a lot of people a lot of questions. As a result, I created a new system for learning the kanji, which I will now explain to you.

### *How NOT to Learn the Kanji*

Before we get into my system, I should clarify some ineffective kanji study methods. Your Japanese teacher, Japanese friend, study buddy, etc. may very well encourage you to do one or all of the following. Don't listen to them.

#### *1. Stroke by Stroke*

This is how a lot of Japanese classes will encourage you to learn the kanji. That's because they teach kanji in the same way that Japanese children learn them—stroke by stroke, over the course of 10+ years.

There's another word for this method: masochism.

Seriously, this is torture. I'm not saying it's impossible to learn this way. I'm just saying that it wastes an unbelievable amount of time.

#### *2. Learning Each Kanji as a Whole*

Kanji are made up of parts... and those parts have meaning. So you should learn the parts first, then the kanji as a whole.

#### *3. Using Only 1 Kanji Study Tool*

A lot of people will write books and blog posts and just about anything you can think of in which they tell you about “the best, fastest, most awesome way to learn the kanji”...which, as coincidence would have it, is their way. Not only that, but pay us money for it, too.

No!

There are a ton of useful kanji study tools and methods out there. But the only way to learn kanji fast and effectively is to combine the best methods into one super-method. And that's what this 97-Day Kanji Challenge is all about: an amalgamation of the best tools and tactics available for learning kanji.

### *How You **SHOULD** Learn the Kanji*



As we continue through this 97-Day Kanji Challenge section, we're going to look at two things:

1. A practical, step-by-step process for getting the kanji into your brain.
2. Thorough explanations as to why we'll study in this manner.

First I'll give a brief overview of the theory behind my method, and then I'll explore that theory in depth as we walk through the step-by-step process.

### *Divide the Kanji into Constituents*

We talked about this earlier with the turkey in the tree example, right?

Say I want to learn the kanji for gather. My Japanese teacher might have told me to write this 1,000 times while repeating the meaning in my head:

集 集 集 集 集 集 集 集 集 集 集 集

Gather. Forget it. I quit.

Instead, we're going to take the (now highly evolved) Heisig approach, yeah?

隹 (turkey) + 木 (tree) = 集 (gather)

"I saw a bunch of **turkeys gathered** in the *tree* outside my window."

I'll see the constituents 集 (turkey) and 木 (tree) in a lot of kanji. So, I'm pretty much guaranteed to remember what those mean, because they'll appear in a story for every kanji that includes them. This means that if I create a good mnemonic (memory device) for remembering that those two add up to mean *gather*, then I will learn the kanji 集 and it will stick. Luckily, there is a trick to making stories stick.

### *Create Effective Mnemonics*

If you take a look at the story that I wrote above, I said:

"I saw a bunch of **turkeys gathered** in the *tree* outside my window."

There is a very specific reason that I said "outside my window." In the house that I grew up in, there was a big ash tree outside of my bedroom window. It is a vivid place in my memory, and I won't forget it my entire life. That is the tree I am picturing when I say: "I saw a bunch of **turkeys gathered** in the *tree* outside my window."

#### What's a mnemonic?

**A mnemonic (RpE: /nə'monɪk/,<sup>[1]</sup> AmE: /nə'ma:nɪk/ the first "m" is silent), or mnemonic device, is any learning technique that aids information retention. Mnemonics aim to translate information into a form that the brain can retain better than its original form.**

❖ [Wikipedia](#)

There's a really [awesome TED Talk](#) by Joshua Foer, a science writer who 'accidentally' won the U.S. Memory Championship. I first learned about this person from the website [Hacking Chinese](#), which has an [amazing article](#) titled "Remembering is a skill you can learn."

If you go look at that article, it will talk about the mechanics of memory. And the author gives a list of random words. I've probably read that article four or five times. The last time that I read it was probably about 6-8 months ago. However, without looking at it again, I'm pretty sure that I can remember that random list of words:

1. Balloon
2. Cannon
3. Sun
4. Child\*
5. King
6. Tree
7. Rabbit
8. Sword
9. Bottle
10. Rain
11. Ship
12. Book
13. Mountain
14. Shovel
15. Water

So, I just wrote that list from memory, and I was only missing one item: #4, Child. **I read a list of random words over half a year ago, and I remembered over 90% of it without reviewing at all.** I was able to do so, because I made a mnemonic story that utilizes my spatial memory (my actual memory of places and things that really exist). If anyone is interested, here's the story:

*I stepped out of my apartment in Shimokitazawa, and I noticed a balloon tied to*

*the banister at the top of the stairs. I went over to look at it, and there was a **cannon** at the bottom of the stairs aimed right at me! It fired, and I dodged it, but it made a hole in the roof, and the **sun** shined through it and hurt my eyes. I tried to climb up through the hole to get away, but it was hard to get through. Luckily, a **child** helped pull me through the hole. “You have to kill the **king**,” he said, pointing at a king sitting on my roof. Instead, I jumped off the roof into the big **tree** behind my house. In the tree, there was a **rabbit**, and the rabbit said, “Take this **sword** to kill the king with.” I said, “No way.” So then he gave me a huge **bottle** of beer, and he said “Drink this for courage.” Suddenly it started to **rain**, and it flooded the entire neighborhood. I thought I was going to drown, but luckily a **ship** came by. So I climbed into the ship. In the ship, the captain was reading a giant **book**. “How do you build a **mountain**?” he asked. “I don’t know,” I said. “You start with a **shovel**,” he said. I looked out around the ship, and there was **water** everywhere.*

That might seem like a very long, detailed story, but it only takes me about 10-15 seconds to go through the whole thing in my mind. There are some notable aspects of it that I’d like to point out:

- The story is full of *real places* that I am extremely familiar with:
  - ✧ The banister at the top of the staircase outside of my real apartment in Shimokitazawa (where the balloon is tied).
  - ✧ The bottom of the staircase I walked down every day (where the cannon is).
  - ✧ The metal roof over the area outside of my front door (which the sun shines through and hurts my eyes after the cannon blows a hole through it).
  - ✧ The big tree right behind my house.
- The story is a little bit ridiculous, because ridiculous stuff is easy to remember.

*“Once upon a time, this idea of having a trained, disciplined, cultivated memory was not nearly so alien as it would seem to us to be today.”*



Joshua Foer

## **Feats of memory anyone can do**

TED2012 • 3.5M views • May 2012

Inspiring, Fascinating

Our minds are capable of amazing things. In particular, scientific studies have shown that **our spatial memories are particularly reliable**. For example, it's pretty easy to find your way to work/school/home only a few days after moving to a new place, right? But reading directions for those things might seem confusing.

Luckily, the same type of memory can be utilized when tackling tedious numbers, facts, and (you guessed it) kanji characters. I'll get more into the specifics of forming your mnemonics later in this section.

### *Only Worry About 1 Thing: Recognizing the Meaning of Characters*

As you will learn very early in your Japanese studies, there are many different elements to “learning the kanji,” which, by itself, is quite a vague statement. For example, consider

the following. Say we have the kanji 食, which means “eat.” There are many aspects to “knowing” this kanji:

# 食

[Words containing](#) [Words beginning with](#) [Words ending in](#) [Sentences](#)

9 strokes

Taught in **grade 2**

328 of 2500 most used kanji in newspapers

Japanese kun: くう, くらう, たべる, はむ

Japanese on: ショク, ジキ

Japanese names: ぐい

English meanings

eat;  
food;

Spanish meanings

alimento;  
comer;  
comida;  
eclipse;

(Image from [Jisho.org](#))

1. In general, it means “eat,” “eating,” or “food.”
2. The On’Yomi (Chinese-derived reading) is しょく / *shoku* or じき / *jiki*.
  - Yeah, by the way, there are different sounds for each kanji. This is one of the side effects of smashing Japanese into the Chinese writing system. So, for one characters, there are many possible readings (ways to pronounce it). We’ll worry about this later. Also, it won’t be stressful at all.
3. The Kun’Yomi (Japanese reading) is た.べる / *taberu* or く.う / *kuu* or く.らう / *kurau*.
4. This is the stroke order:



That’s a lot of info, right? And I’ve had so many readers email me saying that they think they should just learn all of that at once in a sort of get-it-over-with attack on kanji. I also have readers that look at all of that information and just say, “You know what? This just isn’t for me after all.”

There is a much simpler and more positive solution, however:

**Only learn *the meaning* of the character (#1 above).**

Use the process that I'll walk you through in Phase #2 so that when you come across 食, you will know that it means “eat.” And then the rest of that information above you can learn gradually and naturally throughout your studies.

Perhaps there are some of you who disagree with this. I know that **there are so many students of Japanese that stress learning the readings of characters**, after all. If you don't mind, I'd like to elaborate (using the example above) as to why **this is such a waste of time**.

So, for example, say you want to learn the readings of 食. First you're like, okay. しょく (*shoku*) and じき (*jiki*). Only, those are not words by themselves. They only form parts of other words. Yeah, しょく is a super common reading of this character, and you see it in common words like:

- 食事 (しょくじ / *shokujii* / “meal”)
- 食欲 (しょくよく / *shokuyoku* / “appetite”)
- 朝食 (ちょうしょく / *choushoku* / “breakfast”)
- 昼食 (ちゅうしょく / *chuushoku* / “lunch”)
- 定食 (ていしょく / *teishoku* / “set meal (and type of Japanese food)” )

But memorizing the reading of this character does not teach you any of these words. And trying to learn the reading of this character as you learn the meanings of the kanji will only slow down your kanji learning, which will in turn push back your vocabulary learning, which in turn push back your progress in Japanese.

Instead, later in Phase #3, you'll learn a couple of words that use the On'Yomi reading しょく / *shoku*, and you'll naturally start to associate it with that kanji (making all of those words above a cinch to remember). You'll learn to pronounce a word that you already know the meaning of just by looking at its characters. You will know the meaning, because you will have learned all the meanings in Phase #2. So just by looking at that list, you could guess the meaning for most of them:

- 食事 = “eat” + “matter” = “meal”
- 食欲 = “eat” + “longing” = “appetite”

- 朝食 = “morning” + “eat” = “breakfast”
- 昼食 = “daytime” + “eat” = “lunch”
- 定食 = “determine” + “eat” = “set meal”

As you learned words like this, you would naturally get a feel for the reading of the kanji. You would also notice that the reading *じき* / *jiki* is much less common than *しょく* / *shoku* and probably not very relevant at all for a beginner student of Japanese.

Instead of blindly learning the Kun’Yomi without any words attached to the reading, in Phase #3 you could naturally figure out that 食べる / たべる / *taberu* is the most common usage, as it simply means “to eat.” And then you’d learn that 食う / くう / *kuu* is a much less polite (though still exceptionally common) version of the same word: “to eat.” You’d learn that 食らう / くらう *kuraau*, while occasionally used to mean “to eat,” is often used to mean “to receive (something bad),” kind of in the sense of “to (figuratively) eat (something that you don’t want to eat).”

There will come a time when you have to learn all of these things. However, when you learn them, **already knowing the readings of the kanji won’t really help you much at all**. So, in a way, you could say that studying them is kind of meaningless. Some kids, such as myself, might even say that it’s a waste of time.

**I have never studied the On’Yomi and Kun’Yomi readings.** In fact, I had to look up online which one was which before I wrote this section of the guide. And yet (although I don’t like talking about it), my Japanese skills are pretty solid. **And yet, I have steady work as a translator of Japanese, friends that don’t speak Japanese, and I read Japanese novels for fun.** I did all of this without even caring to make a note of the difference between On’Yomi and Kun’Yomi. So I’m going to go ahead and say that we don’t need to worry about it. At least not until Phase #3 when we start filling our heads with a ton of Japanese vocabulary.

Last but not least: the stroke order. If you think that learning the stroke order is fun, then I totally encourage you to study it as you go along (I’ll show you how). I don’t think that it’s totally necessary for learning the kanji, but writing kanji can actually be a lot of fun. And if you’re having fun studying, then that’s always a good thing. It’s also pretty

cool once you start to get accustomed to the writing patterns of Japanese characters. So, yeah, learn it if you feel like it. Or, you know, don't. Whatever.

### *Review Them with an SRS Program (Anki)*

---

I'm not going to talk much about this here, as I talk about it every three seconds throughout this whole guide. But, yeah, let's use Anki so that we can remember these characters long-term. Also, because Anki is set up very nicely to walk us through the kanji one at a time... which I'll be showing you in just a moment here.

### *How Long Will It Actually Take?*

That's a difficult question to answer, because it depends on a number of things. Specifically, **it depends on the frequency and quantity of your studying.**

Using a less-developed version of the system that I'm going to explain in this section, I learned all of the kanji in about three months.

One of the readers on my website used this system, kept track of his progress, and said that he learned all of the joyo kanji in just over 80 days. And that was while he was studying full-time at university.

Honestly, though, **I wouldn't worry about how fast you're moving forward**, as that might just stress you out. Instead, maybe just try to make sure that you are in fact moving, both consistently and efficiently, and you're sure to learn the kanji in no time.

If you follow the Phase #2 instructions exactly, it will take you 97 days.

### *Even the Best Way Will Not Be Easy*

I tried to think of a method where you could just go to sleep, then wake up in the morning with a bunch of kanji memorized. But, uh... it's a work in progress.

I think that what I'm about to present is the fastest method currently available for learning



and retaining the meaning of the each of the 2,136 Jōyō Kanji.

However!

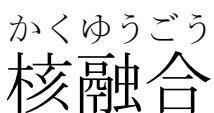
**The “best,” “easiest,” “fastest,” “whatever” way to learn the kanji is still kind of a nightmare.** And I’m really sorry to tell you that. But if you’re serious about learning Japanese, then it’s the most valuable 97 days that you will ever spend studying. **If you know the meaning of the kanji**—even if you don’t know their readings or example vocab to go with them—**every part of your Japanese studies will get easier**, and you will learn faster. Concepts make more sense. Vocab makes more sense. The opposite sex makes more sense. So what are you waiting for? You can do it. I know you can. You are awesome. You are awesome. You are awesome.

Now, bear with me, friend. I vow to not lead you astray...

### *Ninja Tool Amalgamation*

I love the word amalgamation. If I was going to say it in Japanese, though, I guess I’d opt

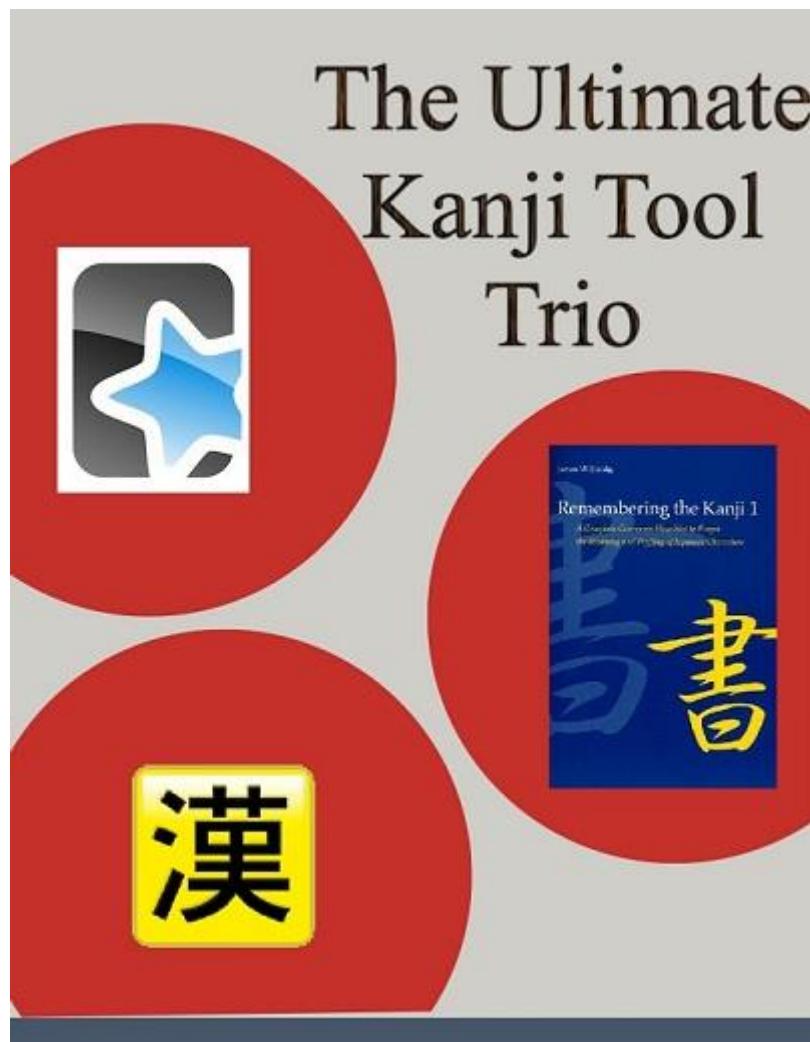
for the word  ゆうごう / *yuugou*, but that actually means “fusion,” like in

 かくゆうごう / *kakuyuugou*, which means “nuclear fusion,” a word that I learned a

long time ago but have yet to come across in a daily conversation. WTF?! Sounds like a difficult word, but it’s not, because you can know its meaning just by looking at the

kanji:  (nucleus) +  (dissolve) +  (fit)... if you take some nuclei, then dissolve them so that they fit, then you’re performing nuclear fusion! Now I get it!

Wow, kanji are awesome. Let’s learn 2,000 of them. We can start by  -ing the three tools that we picked up in Phase #1:



Why these three tools? Well...

1. Anki Flashcards will keep us from forgetting what we learn.
2. Heisig's *Remembering the Kanji* will help us break our kanji into parts so we can learn them via stories and mnemonics.
3. Reviewing the Kanji will save us when we have a hard time coming up with our own kanji stories and mnemonics.

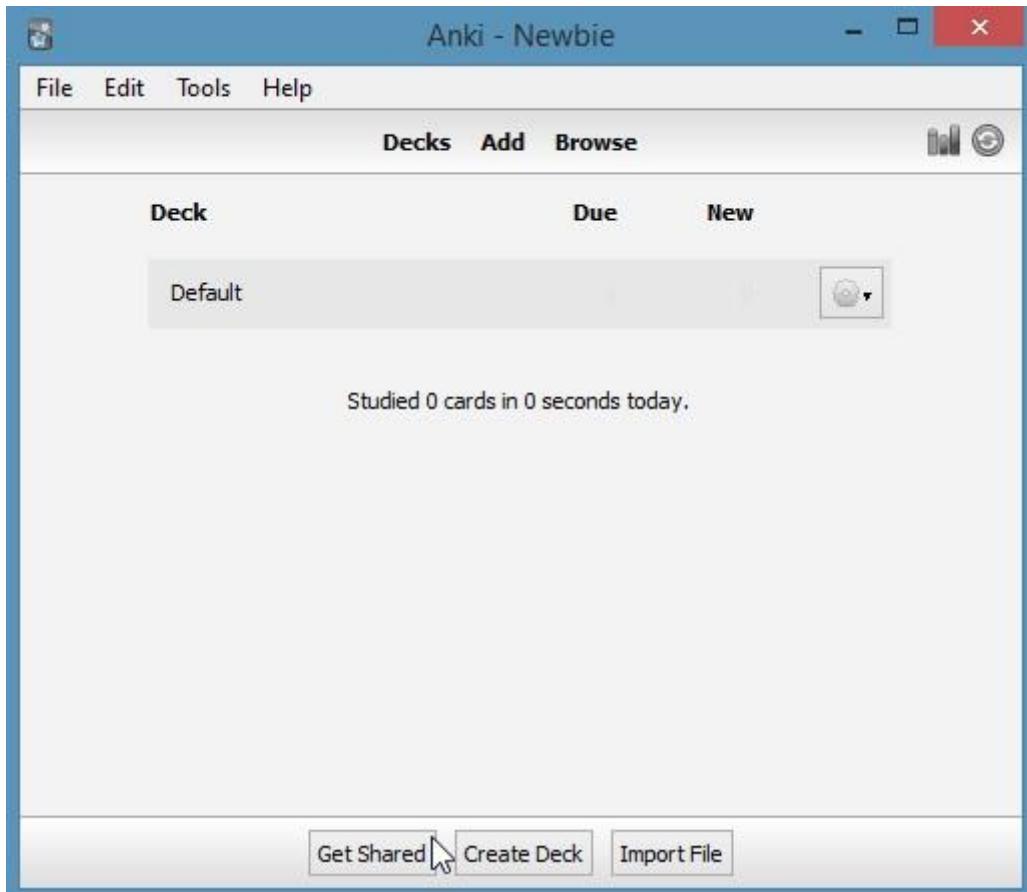
Used together, these three tools can speed up your kanji acquisition exponentially. So let's get started! The first thing you want to do is...

### *Set Up Your Anki Deck*

In my old guide, I had you alter someone else's deck to fit into this system of studying.

This time, instead, I've created a deck for you, and now I'll show you how to set it up.

1. **Download Anki.** You should have already done this in Phase #1. But I know some of you are slackers. Seriously, [go here](#), download it onto your PC, install it, and then open it. (If you have problems, then consult the [help pages](#).) When you open it, you will see a screen like this:



You did it. Yay! Only, you don't have any decks, and you feel a gaping hole in your heart. So, you should...

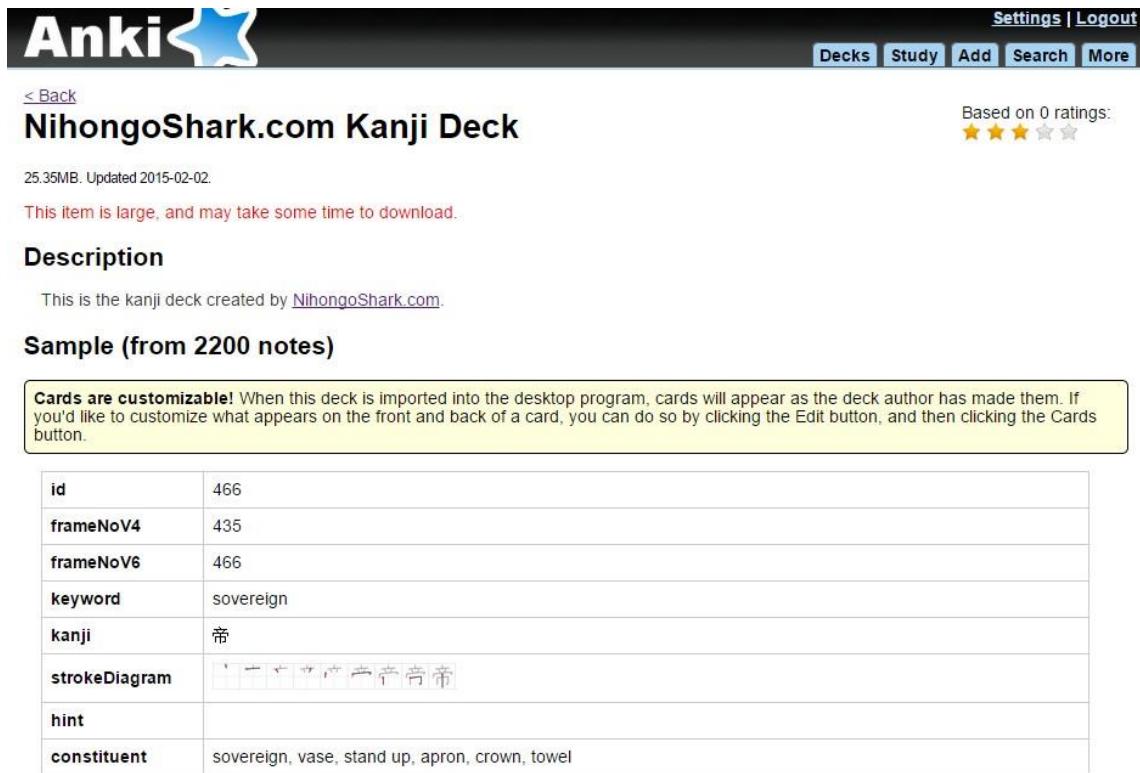
[Download the NihongoShark.com Kanji Deck](#)

See in that photo above? My mouse is hovering over the "Get Shared" button. That's because the next thing we are going to do is get the NihongoShark.com shared kanji deck of glory and awesomeness.

2. **Download the Nihongoshark.com Kanji Deck.** [Use this link](#) to get it. You don't actually have to use the "Get Shared" button above. If you do use it, however, then

just type “NihongoShark.com Kanji” into the search box on the Anki Shared Decks page.

Either way, you should come to a page that looks like this:



The screenshot shows the Anki web interface with the following details:

- Header:** Anki logo, Settings | Logout, Decks, Study, Add, Search, More.
- Page Title:** NihongoShark.com Kanji Deck
- Rating:** Based on 0 ratings: ★★★☆☆
- Deck Info:** 25.35MB, Updated 2015-02-02.
- Message:** This item is large, and may take some time to download.
- Description:** This is the kanji deck created by [NihongoShark.com](#).
- Sample (from 2200 notes):** A box containing a table with the following data:

<b>id</b>	466
<b>frameNoV4</b>	435
<b>frameNoV6</b>	466
<b>keyword</b>	sovereign
<b>kanji</b>	帝
<b>strokeDiagram</b>	
<b>hint</b>	
<b>constituent</b>	sovereign, vase, stand up, apron, crown, towel

Scroll down to the bottom, and then click the “Download” button:



The screenshot shows a card details page with the following data:

<b>kunYomi</b>	しろがね
<b>words</b>	銀(ぎん): silver 銀行(ぎんこう): bank
<b>readingExamples</b>	
<b>Tags</b>	JLPT_4 Jouyou_3

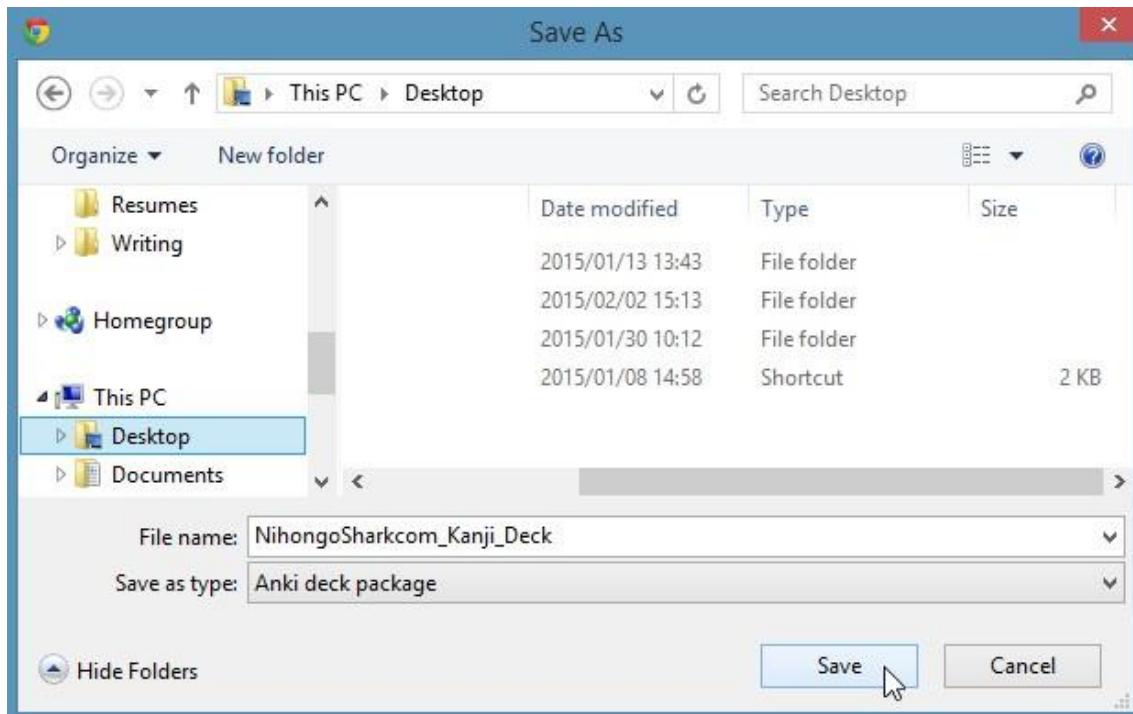
**Download**

After the file is downloaded, double-click on it to open it in the desktop program.

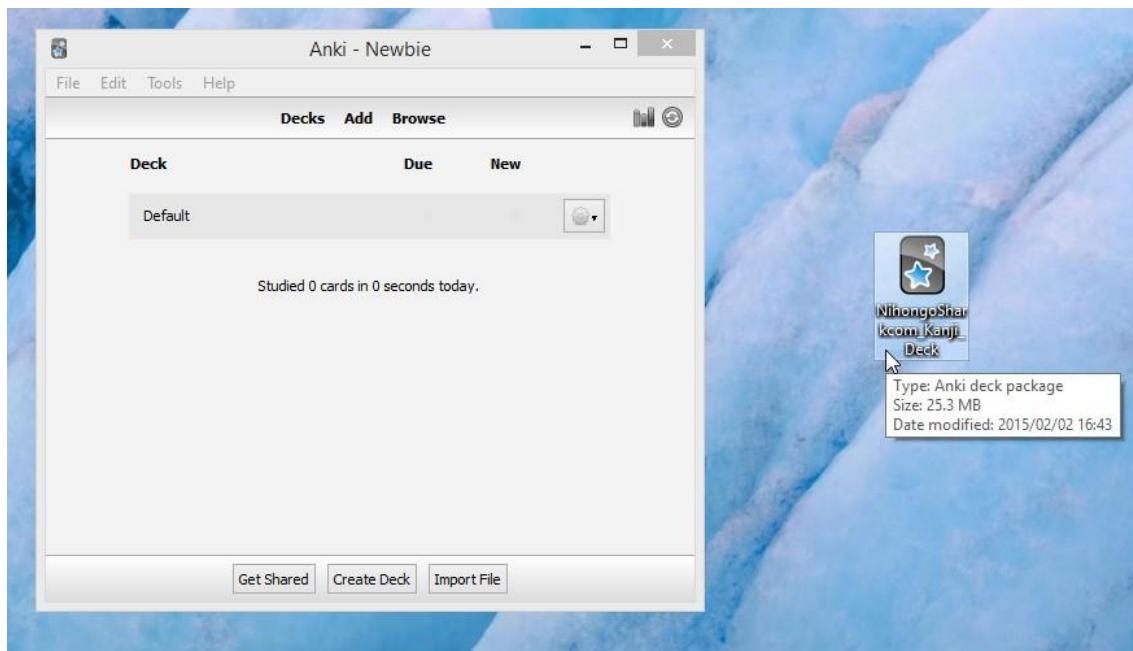
At this time, it is not possible to add shared decks directly to your AnkiWeb account - they need to be added from the desktop then synchronized to AnkiWeb.

**Remove**

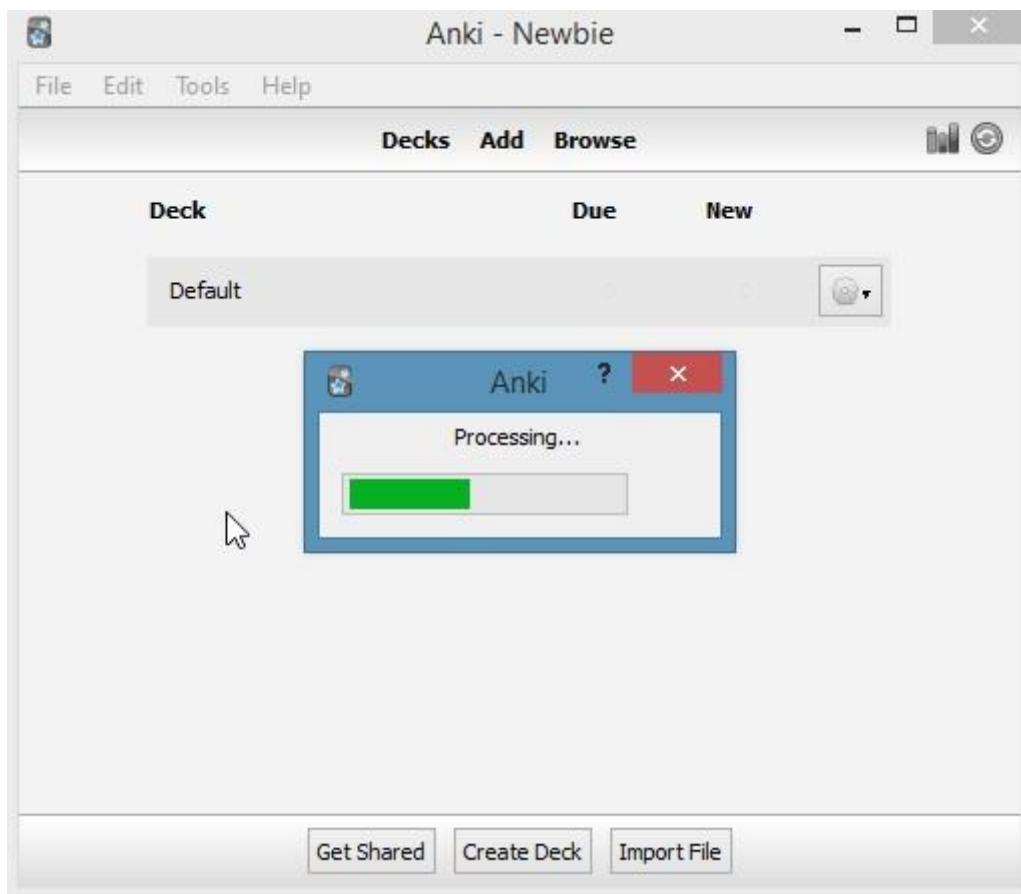
Clicking that will bring up a Save box:



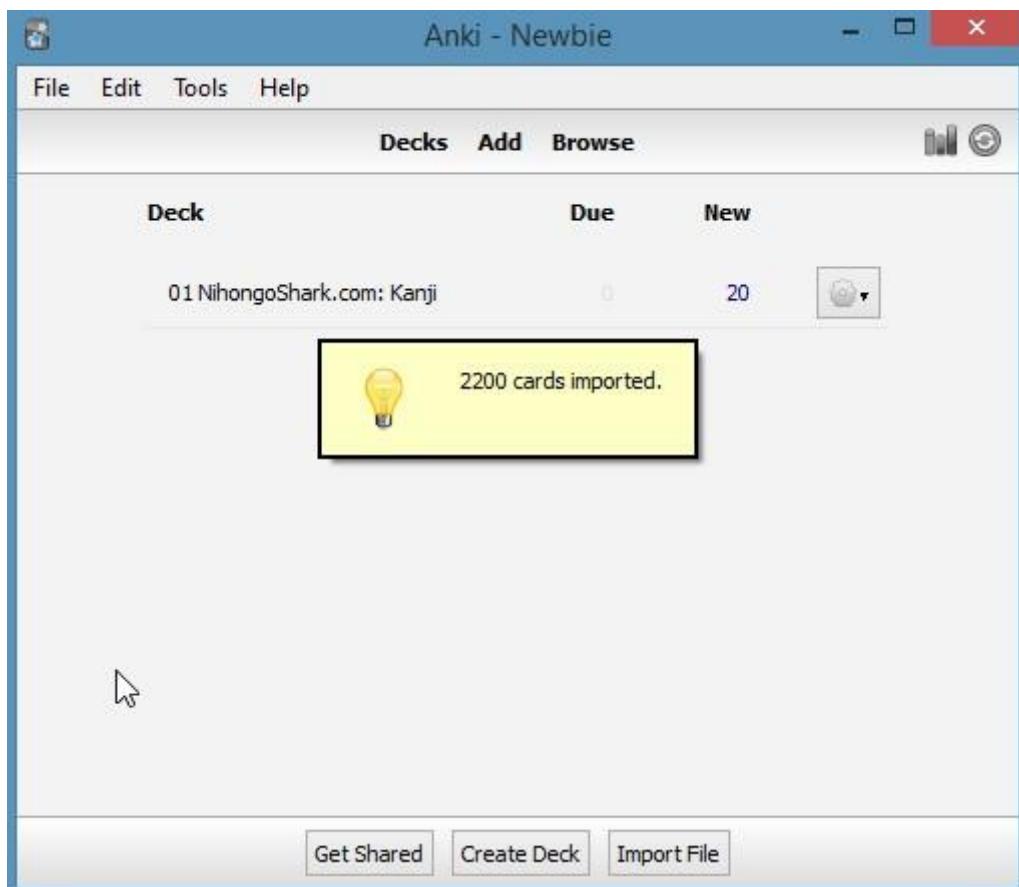
Clicking “Save” will download it. In my case, I downloaded it to my desktop. So I double-click the desktop icon:



Anki will start processing the file:



Then, success! It has imported 2,200 cards:

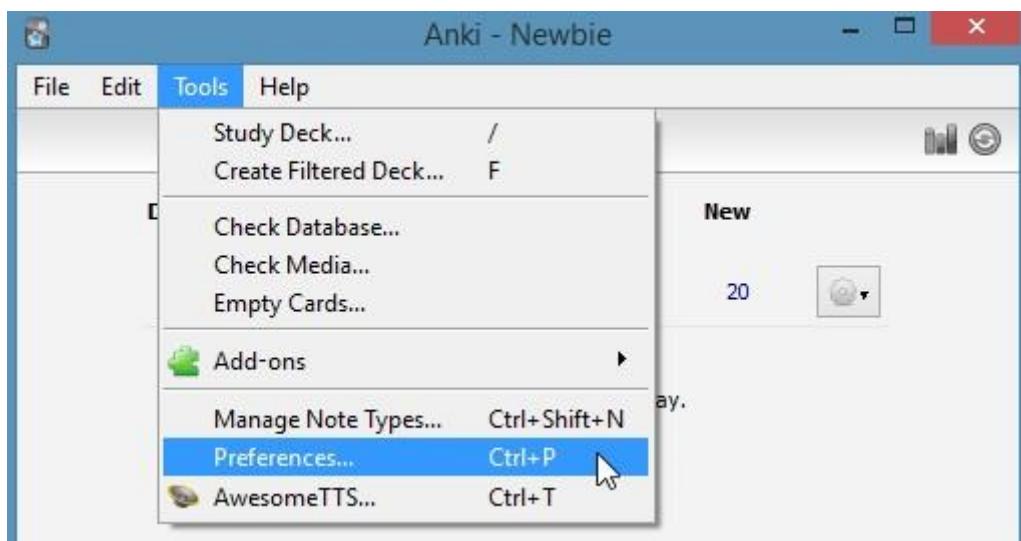


### *[Set Anki Preferences for Efficient Studying](#)*

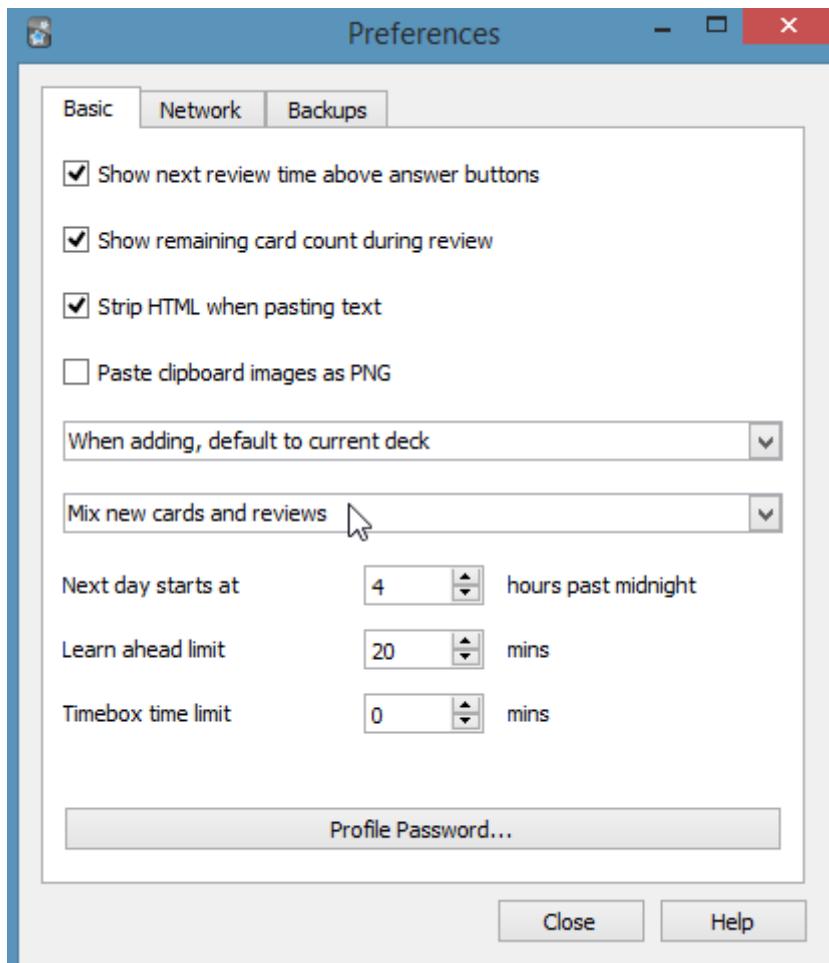
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#### **3. Set Anki's preferences.**

Before we start studying, let's double-check that Anki's settings are optimized for learning the kanji. To do this, in Anki I go to Tools → Preferences:



That will bring up this box:



Our main item of concern is that second dropdown box. See how it says “Mix new cards and reviews?” We need to change that! (I’ll explain why later.) So click the dropdown and select “Show new cards **after** reviews.”

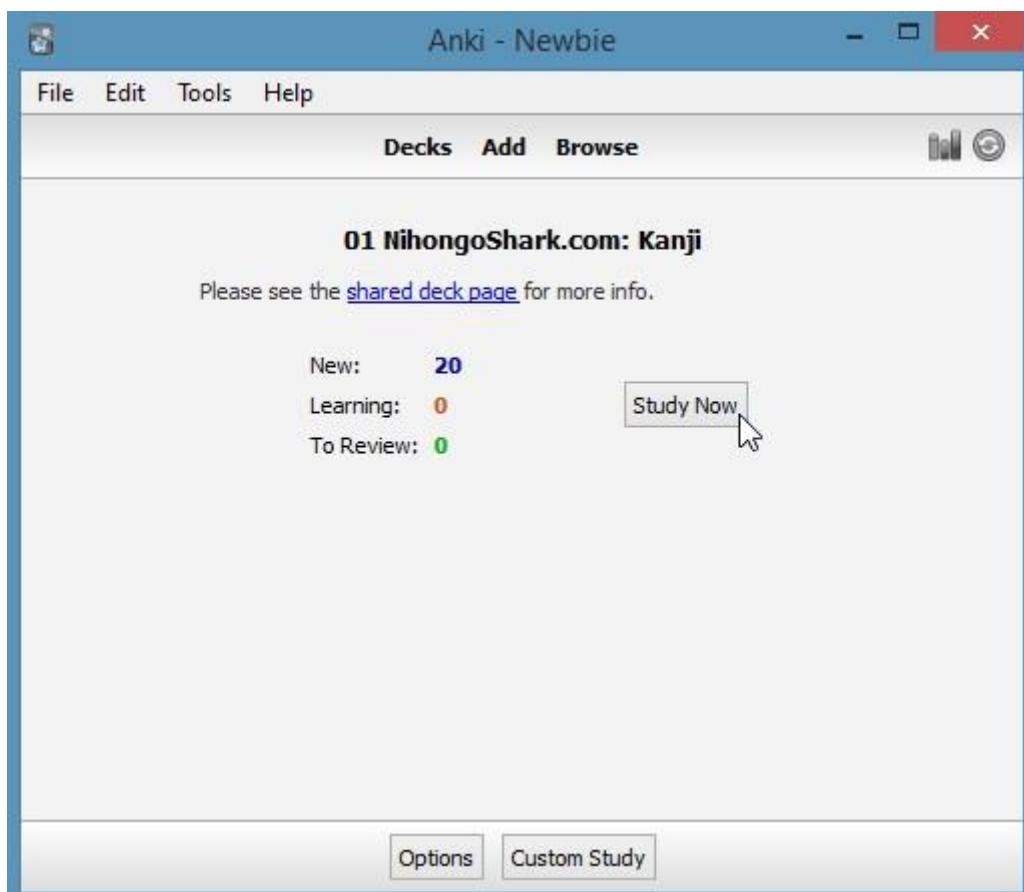


Then you can go ahead and close the preferences box.

Now we’re all ready to start learning some kanji! Let’s get started...

#### *Understanding the Formatting of This Deck*

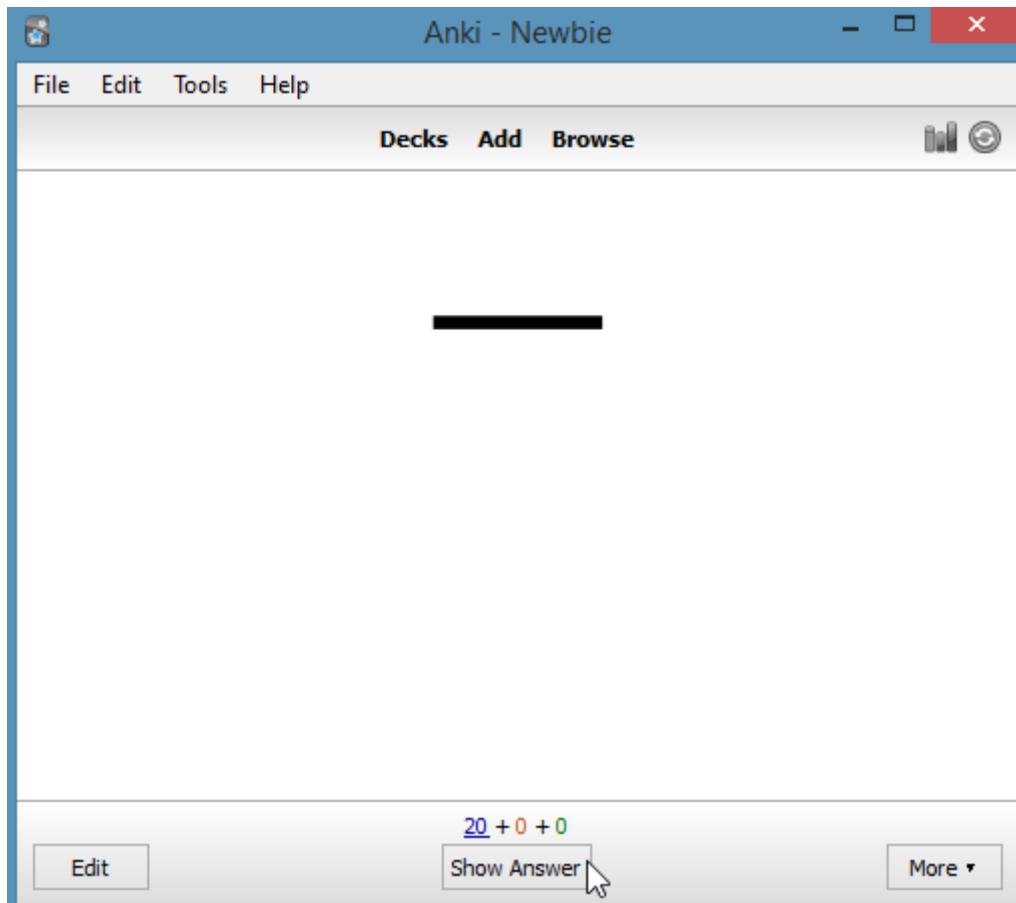
If you open this deck, you will see this page:



Click the “Study Now” button, because...

#### 4. Start learning new kanji.

That’s right. It’s time to start learning kanji right from the start. So clicking “Study Now” will bring up the kanji :



If you click “Show Answer,” it will bring up the back of this flashcard:

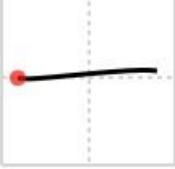
Anki - Newbie

File Edit Tools Help

Decks Add Browse

---

one



Constituents: One

---

Lesson: 1 Frame: 1 Strokes: 1 — Jouyou Grade: 1 JLPT: 5

---

Examples: 一度 (いちど), 一座 (いちざ), 第一 (だいいち), 一 (ひと), 一つ (ひと.つ)

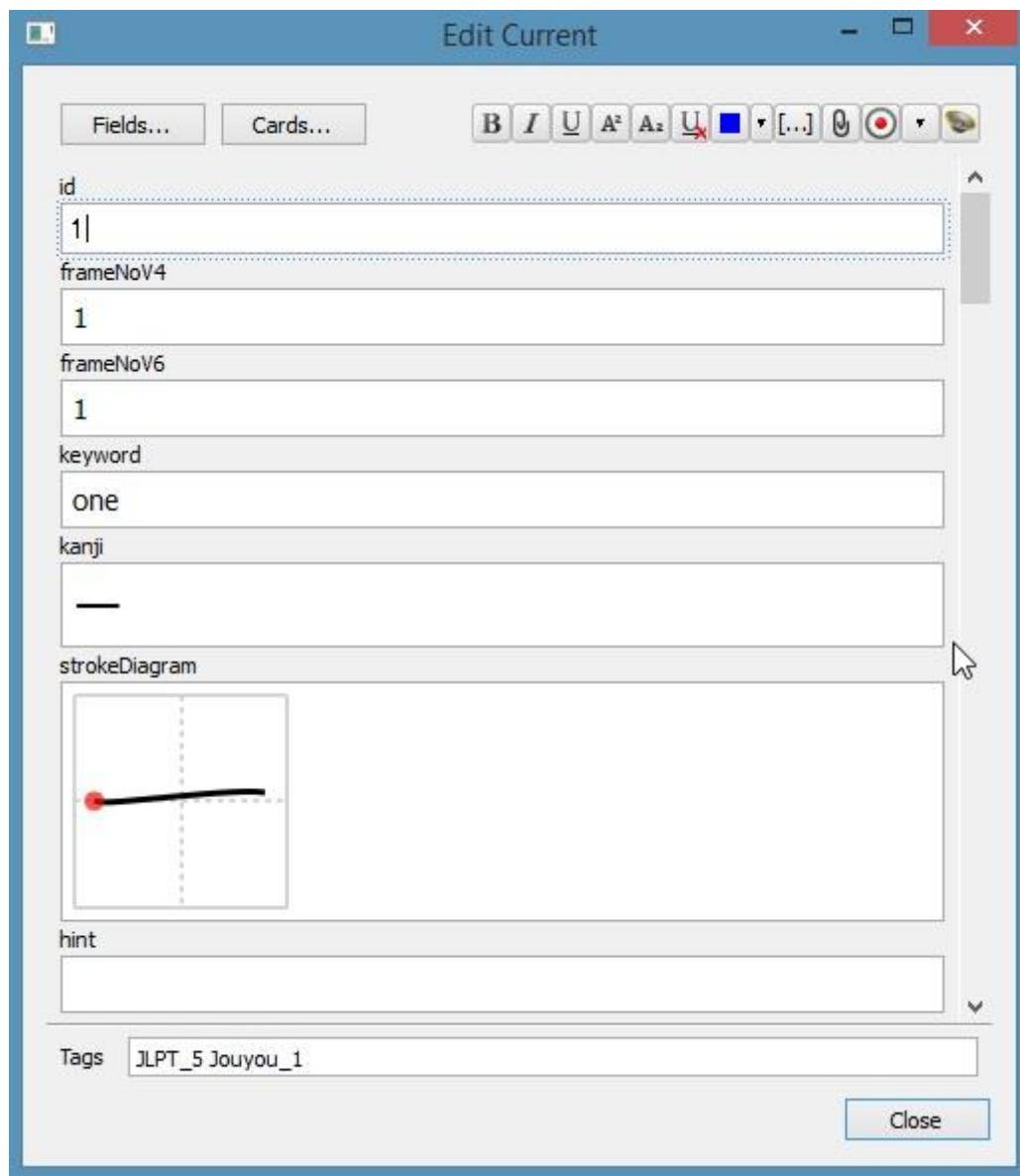
There's a lot of interesting information there, but none of it really helps us to remember this kanji. Well, maybe we don't need any info for remembering the kanji for "One," but you know what I mean. So what we want to do is click the "Edit" button down in the bottom right:

---

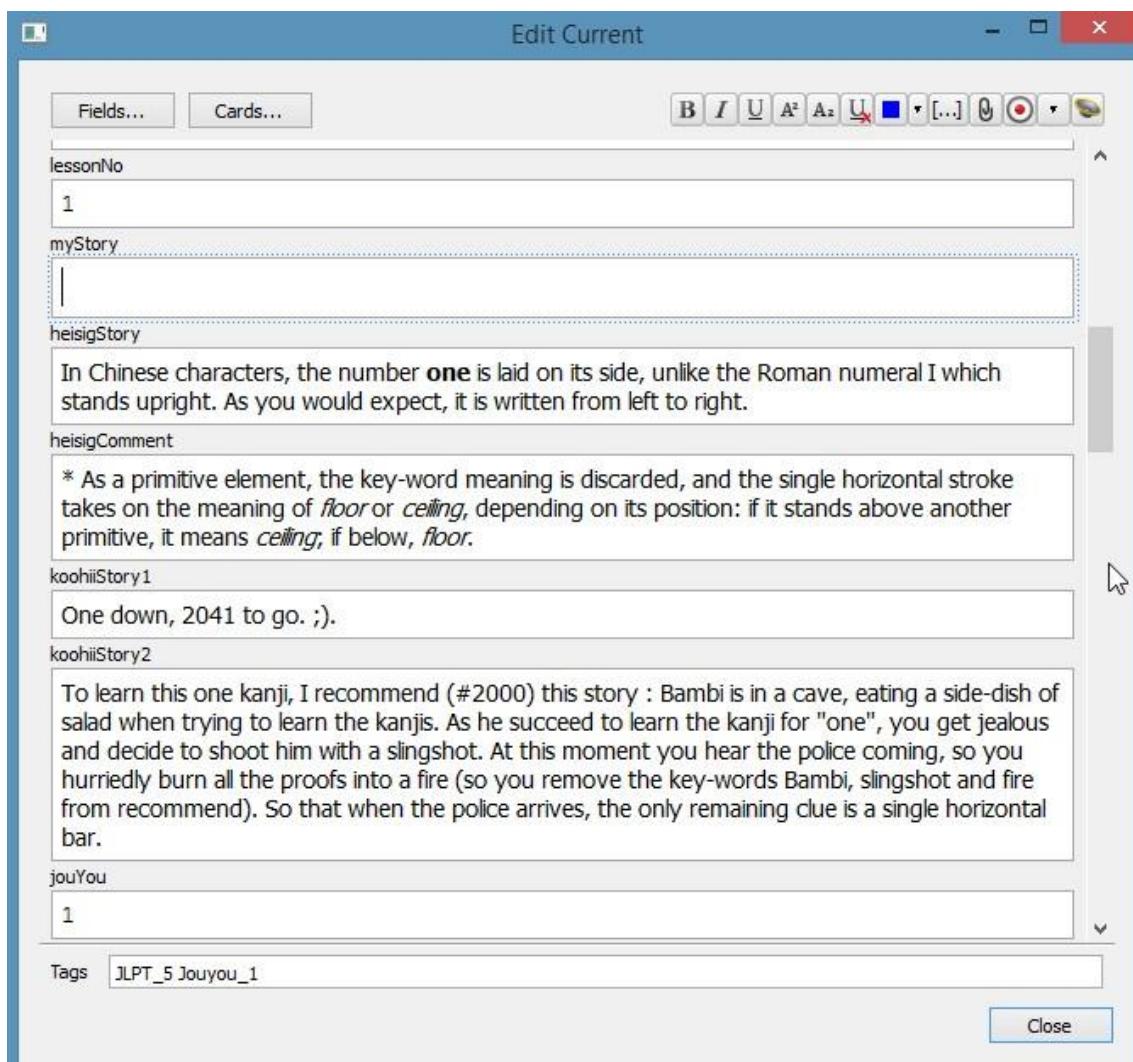
Examples: 一度 (いちど), 一座 (いちざ)

---

Clicking “Edit” will bring up the data for each of this card’s field. There’s quite a lot of it:



Everything we might need is there, things like stroke order, kanji numbers (in the Heisig system), etc. But the real item of concern is the mnemonic. So, let’s scroll down and look at the mnemonic fields:

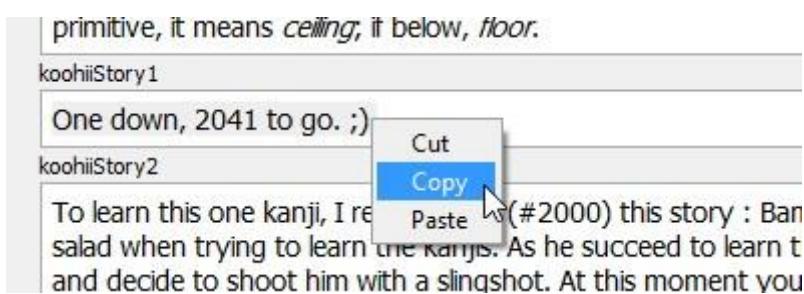


Here's a breakdown of what each of these is referring to:

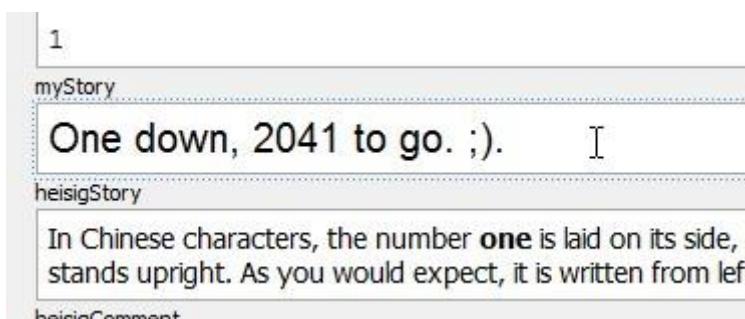
- **myStory** – This field is where we're going to enter our mnemonics. That is, here is where we write the story or memory device that we want to see for this flashcard when we review it.
- **heisigStory** – This field has the story that appears in the *Remembering the Kanji* book. Some of you will realize that this means that you probably don't even need to be buying this book, then. I feel like that's not totally fair to Heisig himself, though. So if you have the funds, maybe buy it anyways?
- **heisigComment** – This field has the comment that appears in the *Remembering the Kanji* book as a supplement to the kanji's story.
- **koohiiStory1** – This field has the most popular story on the koohii Reviewing the Kanji site.

- **koohiiStory2** – This field has the most popular story on the koohii Reviewing the Kanji site.

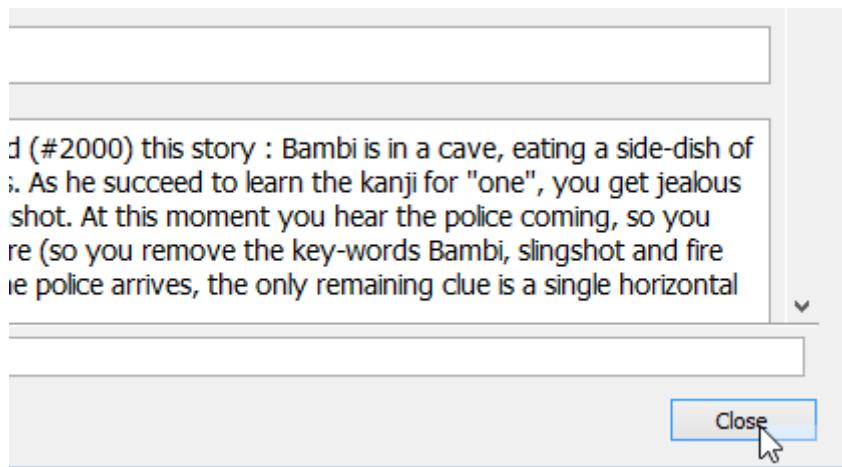
The kanji 一 is so incredibly basic that I probably don't need to spend any time at all making a story for it. So, I'll just swipe koohiiStory1:



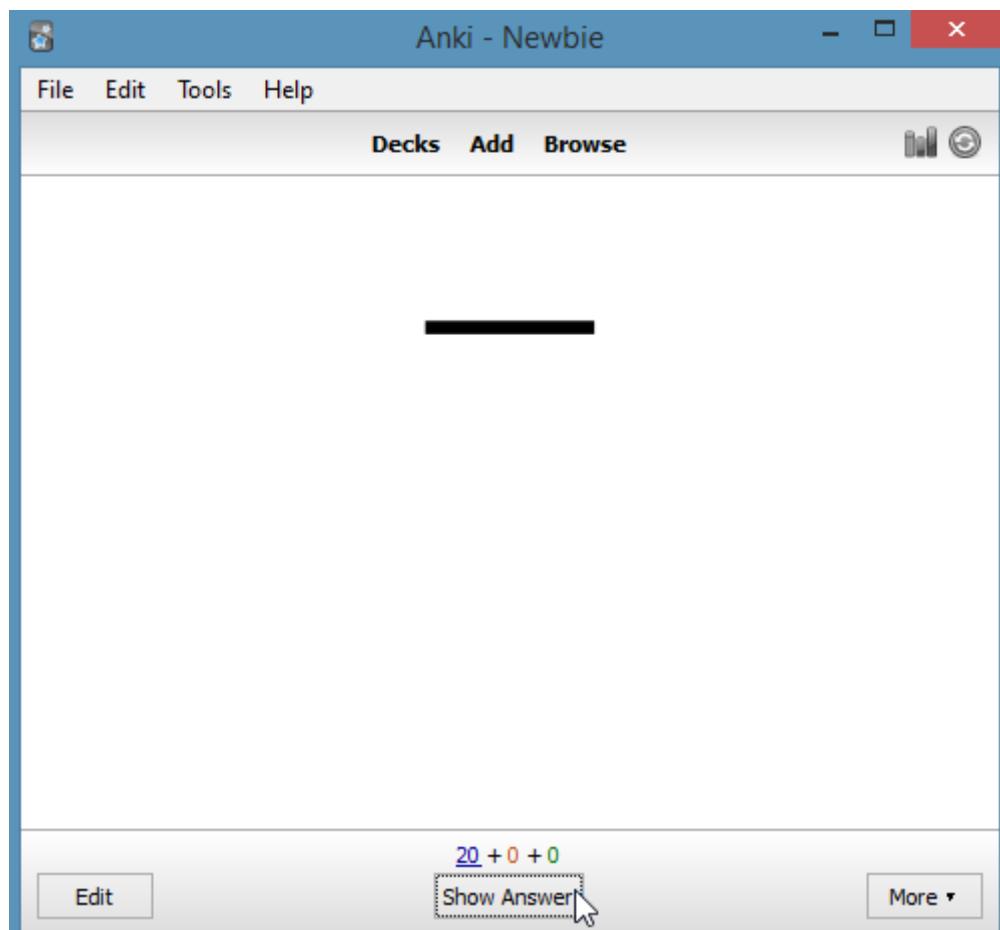
I select and copy it (above), then I paste it into the myStory field:



Now I click "Close:"



Doing so, I will once more be faced with the front side of the card:



I click "Show Answer," and...

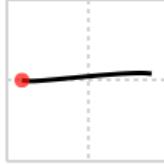
Anki - Newbie

File Edit Tools Help

Decks Add Browse

---

one



Constituents: One

One down, 2041 to go. ;).

---

Lesson: 1 Frame: 1 Strokes: 1 — Jouyou Grade: 1 JLPT: 5

---

Examples: 一度 (いちど), 一座 (いちざ), 第一 (だいいち), 一 (ひと), 一つ (ひとつ)

Edit <1m <10m 4d Again Good Easy More ▾

As you can see, now my story [= my mnemonic] appears right under the list of constituents [= parts] of this kanji. I click “Good” and that kanji hides away for a few minutes, programmed to pop up at whatever time I might be prone to forgetting it today, next week, a month from now, in a year—whenever:

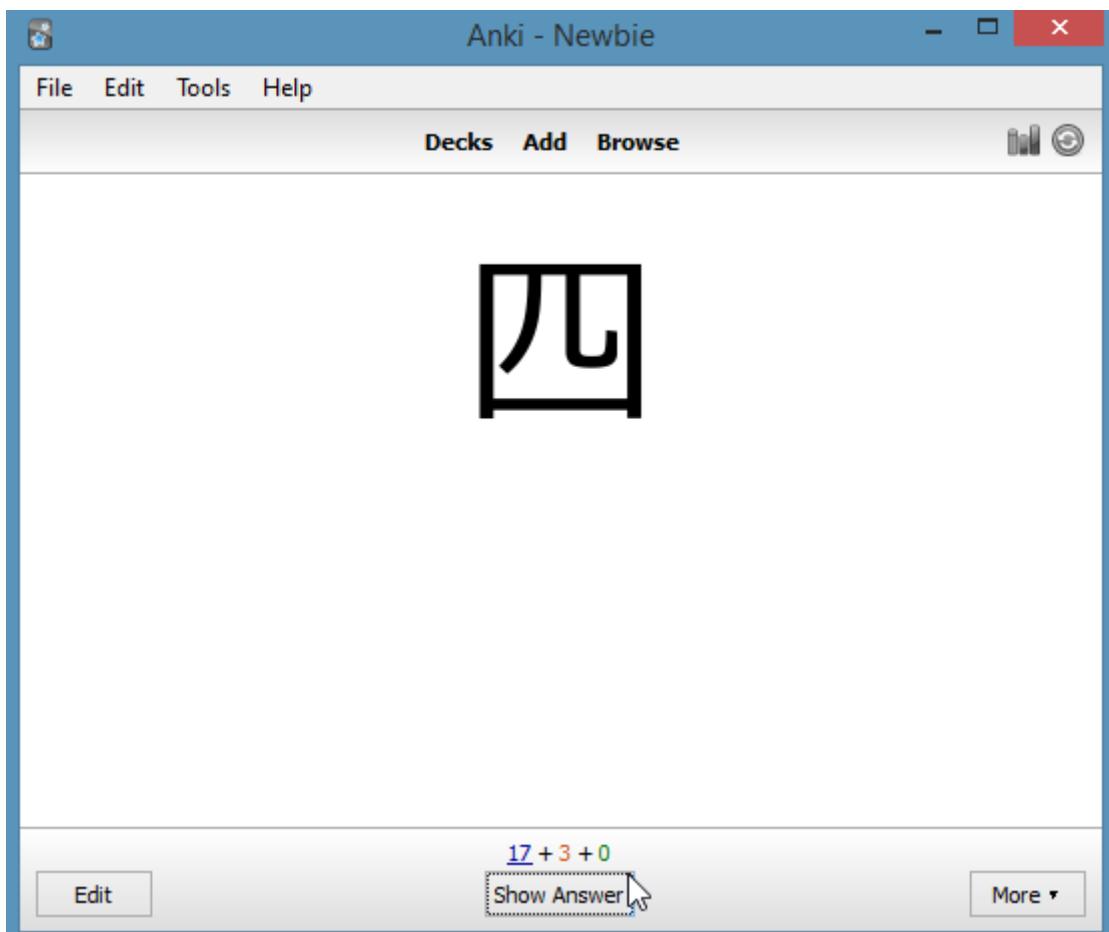


So now we have learned our first kanji! And because it’s in our Anki deck, **we will never forget it**. That’s amazing!

Go ahead and repeat that same process for the second and third kanji, which, as you might have guessed, are the kanji for “two” and “three.”

### *Learning New Kanji*

I’d like to take an in-depth look at the kanji learning process. In doing so, let’s walk through the kanji for “four.”



### *Dividing Kanji into Constituents*

You might see this kanji for “four” and think, “Hey, things are starting to get complicated.” You hit “Show Answer,” and you even get some new constituents that you’ve never heard of:

Anki - Newbie

File Edit Tools Help

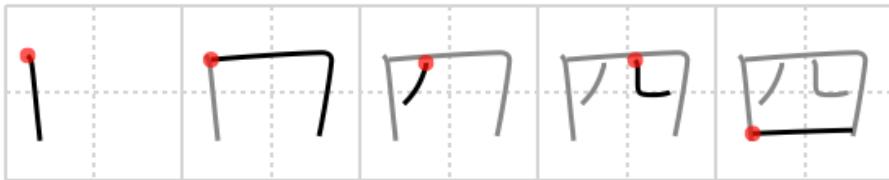
Decks Add Browse

---

四

---

four



Constituents: four, pent in, human legs

---

Lesson: 1 Frame: 4 Strokes: 5 — Jouyou Grade: 1 JLPT: 5

---

Examples: 四 (よ), 四つ (よ.つ), 四つ (よっ.つ), 四 (よん)

Edit Again <1m Good 4d Easy More ▾

“Pent in?” “Human legs?” Those “constituents” are referring to the parts of the kanji. If you have the *Remembering the Kanji* book, these are written out for you: The outside “mouth” (strokes #1, 2, 5) is written separately for you, and the inside “human legs” (strokes #3, 4) are written separately for you. This makes it very easy to understand what these “constituents” are referring to.

For those of us who don’t have the *Remembering the Kanji* book, however, the next best thing we can do is look at the *heisigStory* and *heisigComment* fields. So let’s click “Edit” and take a look at it:

#### heisigStory

This character is composed of two primitive elements, *mouth* and *human legs*, both of which we will meet in the coming lessons. Assuming that you already knew how to write this kanji, we will pass over the "story" connected with it until later. Note how the second stroke is written left-to-right and then top-to-bottom. This is consistent with what we have already seen in the first three numbers and leads us to a general principle that will be helpful when we come to more complicated kanji later on: write north-to-south, west-to-east, northwest-to-southeast.

Okay, whatever. That didn't help me figure out these "constituents" much at all. Sometimes it does, but not this time. Luckily, it's kind of obvious what is referring to "mouth" and what is referring to "human legs," so maybe we'll be okay without the *Remembering the Kanji* book after all.

#### *Using Constituents to Make Mnemonics*

Once I figure out what each "constituent" is, I need to decide what myStory is going to be. As for 四, the story for koohiiStory1 isn't bad:

#### koohiiStory1

FOUR year-olds often put their FOOT (human legs) in their MOUTH - but they are too young to realize.

This story is a great example of why I encourage writing your own mnemonics. This story seems great, and it seems easy to remember. But a lot of stories that seem to have great mnemonics just don't stick, and I think that the reason is a lack of connection to the learner. **Just because the mnemonic is clever or makes sense does not mean that you will remember it.**

However, koohiiStory1 has given me an idea for a story that will stick, which I write in myStory:

#### myStory

**A four-year-old version of myself with four human legs in his mouth (sitting on the floor next to my bedroom door at my apartment in Sapporo).**

You might be thinking, “That story sucks, Niko.” Well, perhaps. However, there are some features to it that I’d like to point out, features that make it very easy for *me personally* to remember:

1. This is a real place that I am extremely familiar with.
2. I know exactly what I looked like when I was four, because I have seen a picture of myself at the age of four (a specific picture that I’m recalling).
3. This story is kind of creepy. And anything that’s creepy, ridiculous, frightening, hilarious, or shocking is much more likely to stick in my mind.
4. I will never use this exact spot (on the floor next to my bedroom door at my

apartment in Sapporo) ever again. The kanji  now owns this spot.

Every time I see this spot, there should be a four-year-old version of myself with his four legs in his mouth. Every time I imagine this spot, it should have a four-year-old version of myself with his four legs in his mouth. **It’s almost like I’m pretending that this actually happened in this place that exists in the real world that I am familiar with.**

### *The Science of Memory*

---

When I first read *Remembering the Kanji*, Heisig told me about 1,000 times to make sure that my mnemonics were *visual*. Only, never in my life have I considered myself to have a “visual memory.” So usually that advice didn’t do me any good at all. When I wrote stories for mnemonics I used to try really hard to “visualize” what I was writing so that I could recall the kanji in this magic way that Heisig was describing. Yet, it almost never worked.

It wasn’t until years later (while I was researching the science of memory) that I realized that my memory, though not “visual,” was highly “spatial.” Because **all humans have an incredible spatial memory**. There are some places in this world that you know really well. You know every nook and cranny of your home. You know how to get from your bed to the front door of your office (or classroom, whatever). You could close your eyes and make that trip in your mind, seeing thousands of details along the way—the height of the roof in your bedroom; the type and size of window in your living room; the type of handle on your front door; the corner at the end of your street.

We can take those little pieces of your incredible spatial memory, and we can add kanji mnemonics to them. Maybe the moment you open the curtains of your living room

window, there is both a sun 日 and a moon 月 shining outside, making it so bright 明 that you can't see [whatever you would normally see outside of your living room window].

Assuming you have a living room window, that story should be pretty easy to conjure up. You can picture yourself opening up the blinds, curtains, whatever. You know exactly where you would be standing when that happened. You know exactly what you would not be seeing because of the giant, bright sun and moon filling up the entire scene. And that's probably more memorable than any of these:

heisigStory

Among nature's **bright** lights, there are two that the biblical myth has God set in the sky: the *sun* to rule over the day and the *moon* to rule the night. Each of them has come to represent one of the common connotations of this key word: the *sun*, the **bright** insight of the clear thinker, and the *moon*, the **bright** intuition of the poet and the seer (see frame 13).

heisigComment

koohiiStory1

The sun makes the moon bright.

koohiiStory2

The sun and the moon are brightest objects in the day and night, respectively.

Some of you may have already realized this, but what I'm talking about specifically is creating Memory Palaces. I didn't talk about it too much, but that is essentially what Joshua Foer (the science writer I talked about earlier) was doing when he "accidentally" won the U.S. Memory Championship. Memory Palaces are all the rave these days. You can read about them [on Wikipedia](#). You can look at [sites dedicated to them](#), and you can even read [entire books](#) on how to create them. Even BBC's [Sherlock Holmes uses them](#). I'm not really going to get into them in too much depth, though, because every time I read an article about them, I get distracted and give up on whatever it was I was trying to memorize in the first place... in this case, the kanji!

Let's just say, for the sake of brevity, that **you can turn any place that you know really well into a memory palace, and then you can have kanji stories take place in them.** This is sweet, because our spatial memory is super-powered.

### *Living in a World of Kanji*

---

The reason that I don't like guides on building memory palaces is that they're usually quite time-consuming. You read long explanations about how to make these memories stick, about how to walk through your "Memory Palace" 8,000 times until you really get to know it well.

**For me, though, the only way this has ever worked was just to start doing it.** Then, I took note of what worked (i.e. what I was remembering) and what didn't work (i.e. what I was still forgetting over and over again).

Practice makes perfect, right? So let's make 10 bad memory palaces before we try to start making a bunch more really awesome ones. Specifically, I'm going to ask you to create 56!

56 Memory Palaces?! Yeah, it sounds like a lot. But they don't have to be big. Why 56, you ask? Because *Remembering the Kanji* has 56 lessons, and in each lesson we can use one memory palace. If you look at the fields in your kanji deck, you will see that each card also lists the kanji lesson. For "bright," it was lesson number 2 (look at where my mouse is):

strokeCount	8
lessonNo	2
myStory	<p>The sun and moon made the sky so bright (that I couldn't see anything outside of my living room window).</p>

I have found that my memory palaces always work best if I walk through them in the same order every time. So, as we go through a lesson, we can try to write stories in order as well. This will help us connect stories to one another and bring up points that

we are nearly forgetting. For example, in the random list of words from Hacking Chinese, I remembered that “cannon” came after “balloon,” because the moment I looked at the “balloon,” a “cannon” fired at me, and this opened up a hole in the roof, through which the “sun” (the next word) was shining brightly.

Some of you might still be thinking: But 56 Memory Palaces?! Yeah. It’s not a lot. Let’s see how many I can think of giving myself a 5-minute limit:

1. My apartment in Sapporo.
2. My old apartment in Shimokitazawa.
3. The walk from my apartment in Sapporo to the gym in Odori.
4. The walk from my apartment in Shimokitazawa to my workplace in Shinjuku.
5. The walk from Shinjuku to Yoyogi along Meiji-dori.
6. The walk from Yoyogi to Harajuku along Meiji-dori.
7. The walk from Harajuku to Shibuya along Meiji-dori.
8. My parents’ condo in San Diego.
9. My high school.
10. My college campus.
11. My middle school.
12. My elementary school.
13. The walk from my parent’s condo in San Diego to the beach.
14. My apartment in college.
15. The walk from my apartment in college to the beach.
16. The drive from my hometown to San Diego (where I went to college).
17. My last workplace.
18. The workplace before that.
19. The workplace before that.
20. The workplace before that.
21. My apartment in Bangkok.
22. The walk from my apartment in Bangkok to the BTS Station.
23. The BTS stations between On Nut and Asok in Bangkok.
24. East Shinjuku.
25. Senta-gai in Shibuya.

All of these are places and routes that I know extremely well, because I have passed

through them countless times. They are all probably meaningless to you, but **each of these places is concretely imprinted into my spatial memory**. I do a lot of walking, so a lot of those are walks. Actually, I'm pretty sure I could just list 25 different walks in Tokyo. But that's because I'm kind of obsessed with going for long walks, especially in big cities. But maybe you like going for drives. Or maybe you know the world of a video game in depth. Whatever works for you.

**We can take these vivid places, and then we can place ridiculous, frightening, sexual, disgusting stories in them in order to memorize the meaning (and writing) of all of the kanji.** So, not only will you be learning to read Japanese, but you'll also be improving your memory and studying how to become a master of it. I don't know about you, but I think that that's downright amazing.

### *Why We're Doing Kanji (Front) → Keyword (Back) Flashcards*

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If any of you read my last book, or looked at any of the other kanji decks and advice in the world, almost everyone will tell you to study your kanji flashcards the other way around: With the keyword on the front side and the kanji itself on the backside.

Specifically, there are two reasons why I choose to do this the other way around:

1. **It's easier.** And easy is good, because easy is fast. And if we can learn kanji quickly and easily, then we are less likely to give up, more likely to complete this kanji journey, and therefore extremely likely to stick with our Japanese studies until we reach pro ninja status.
2. **It's more useful.** You don't need to know how to write the kanji. At least, not from memory. Sometimes you might have to write some kanji on an address or a form at the city office or something, but 99.99% of your interaction with kanji will be recognizing and reading the characters. So, I think that we should prioritize recognizing and reading the characters. We're mastering the meaning here in Phase #2, and we're mastering the pronunciation through vocabulary acquisition in Phase #3. To the best of my knowledge, that's the most efficient way to spend our time.

### *Keep a Time-Efficient Flow*

---

One downside to writing your own mnemonics, especially if you’re anything like me, is that it can give rise to unbridled daydreaming. There are far too many times when I have been trying to think of a story for a kanji, and I got lost in my thoughts and wasted a lot of time that I could have spent learning more kanji.

Part of this study process is digging into the recesses of our brains, which is really awesome. However, a side effect of doing so is that we can get lost in the recesses of your brain. As a countermeasure, it might be a good idea to write new kanji stories with a timer that buzzes at you every 5 minutes. Then, if you are taking longer than 5 minutes to come up with a rad mnemonic connected to a spatial memory (a place [in a memory palace] that you know), then copy one of the stories taken from Heisig or koohii and move onto the next kanji. Doing this is okay, because we’re going to...

### *Clean Up Mnemonics over Time*

---

There is a delicate balance between creating mnemonics that work and optimizing the time spent writing them. If you feel like your mnemonic is “just okay,” but you don’t want to waste more time working on it, then just save it and move onto the next kanji.

The cool thing about Anki is that every card you save will show up in the future (over and over and over again). So, if you find that you’re forgetting the meaning of a kanji multiple times during review, then it’s probably a sign that your mnemonic isn’t so good. At that time, you can just hit “Edit,” clean up the story, and keep on moving forward.

**Perfectionism will be your doom.** Small, consistent improvements over a long period of time are the key to huge successes, especially when talking about the acquisition and mastery of skills.

### *Using Other Peoples’ Mnemonics*

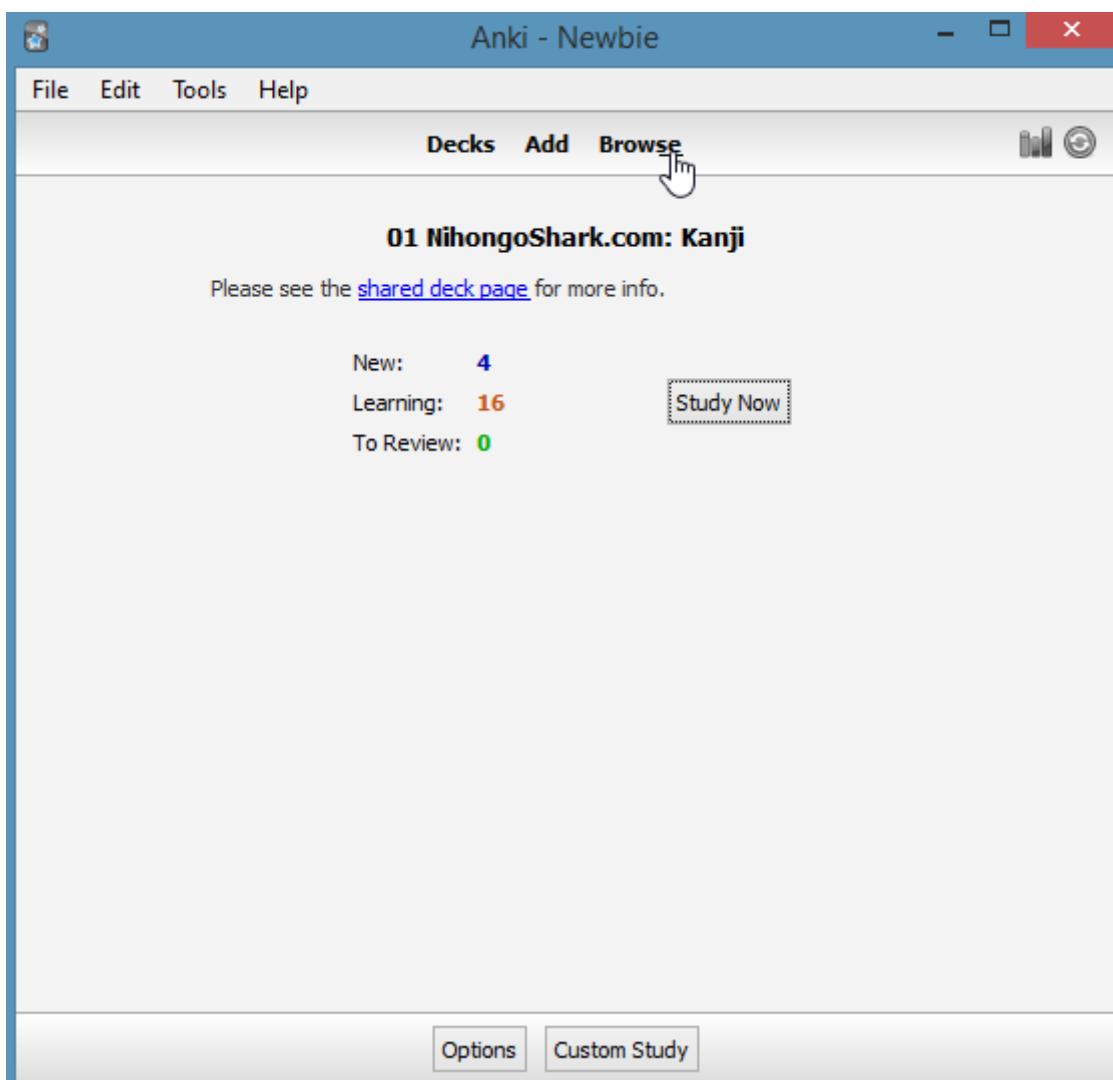
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As I said before, if you’re taking too long to make up your own awesome mnemonic, you always have the option of simply hitting “Edit,” copying one of the stories already filled into the “koohii” or “Heisig” field, then pasting it into the “myStory” field.

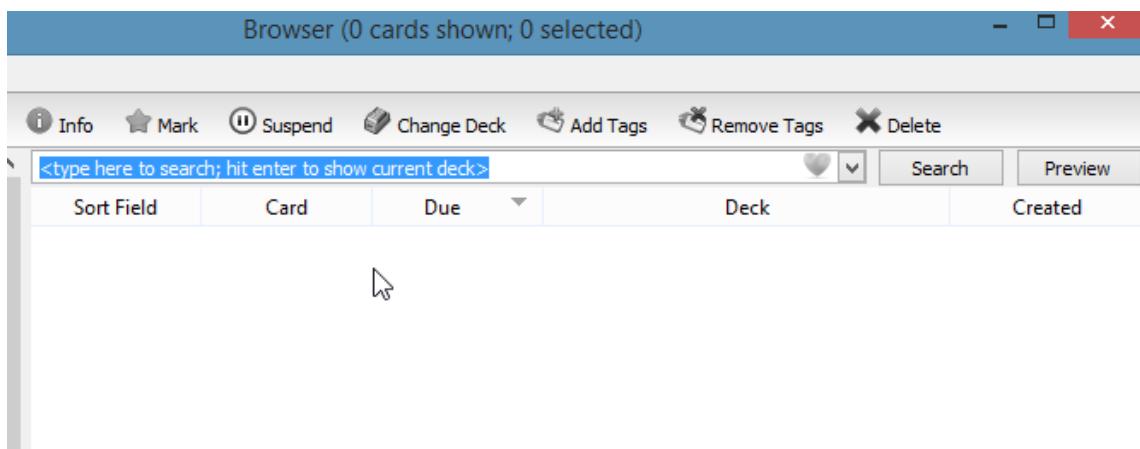
Also, as I’m sure many of you have already realized, you do have the option of just setting

up your cards so that the koohi stories automatically show up in cards. Personally, I don't think that this is the best way to learn these characters long-term, as **I have forgotten A LOT of characters using other people's stories**. This makes sense if you think about the mnemonic techniques discussed above, **because these stories had no spatial or emotional connection to my world**.

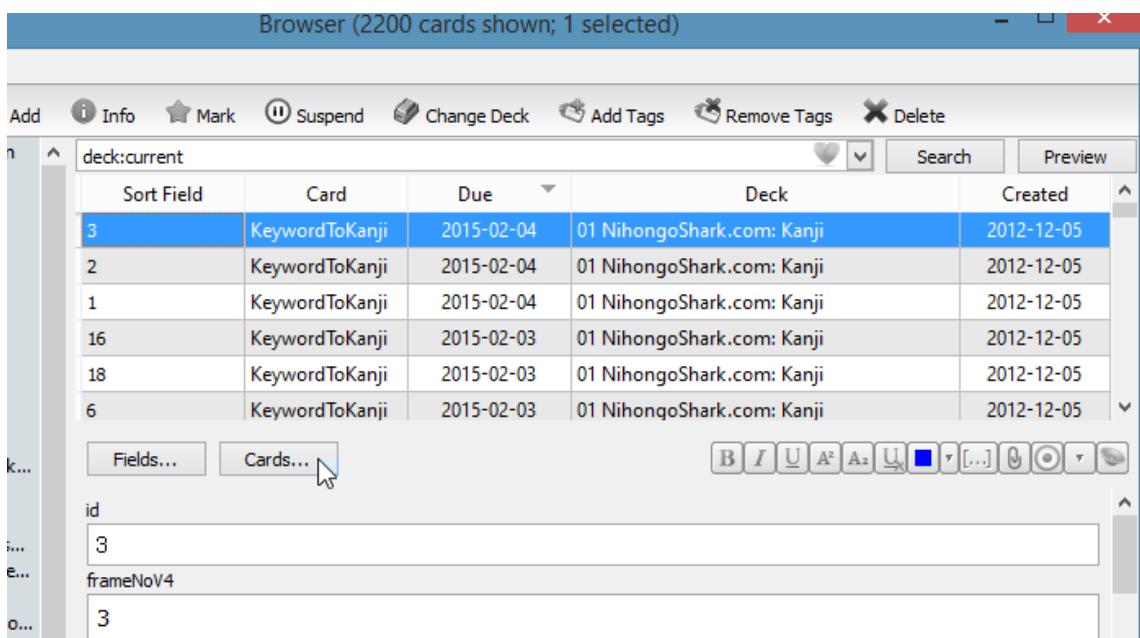
Still, just because I don't think it's effective does not give me the right to keep from divulging this option to you. In the end, it's your decision. Therefore, for those of you who want to have kooohiStory1 show up in the cards automatically, this is what you need to do (you can skip this step if you're following my method):



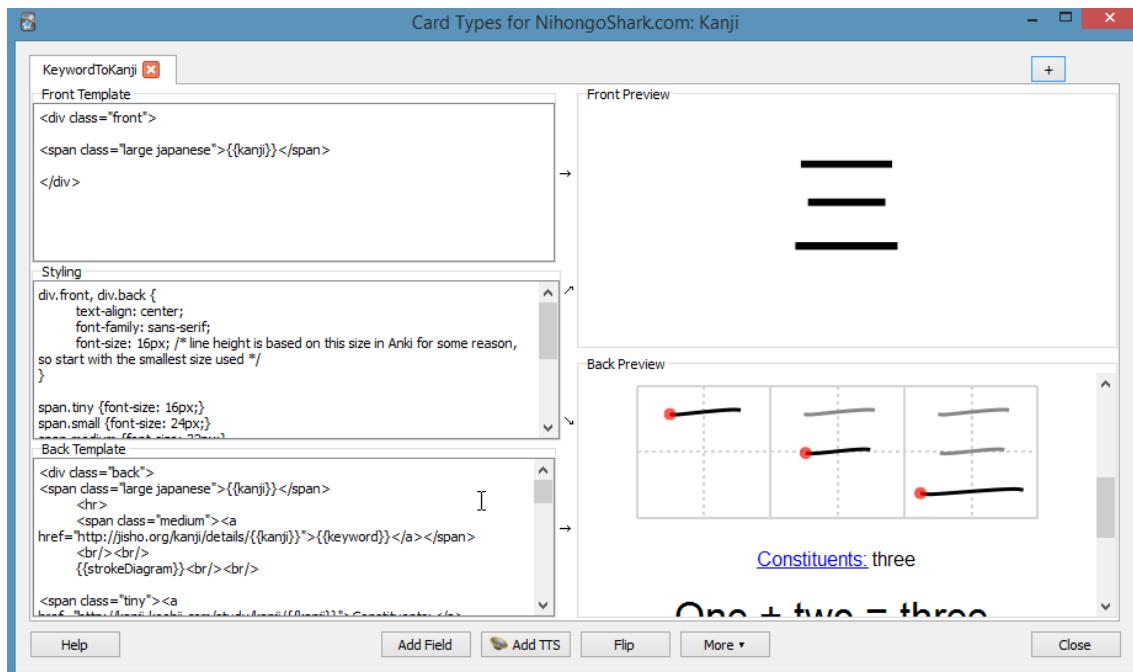
Click on your kanji deck, bringing you to the screen above, then click "Browse." You should see this:



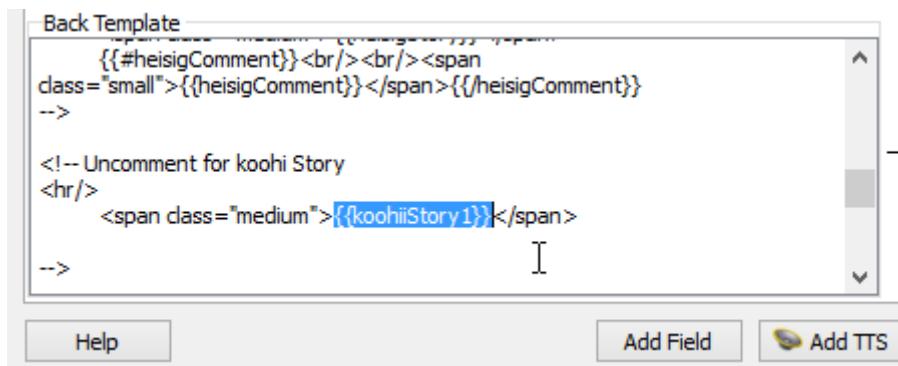
Hit “Enter” on your keyboard to bring up all the cards in the deck. Select one of the cards and hit “Cards:”



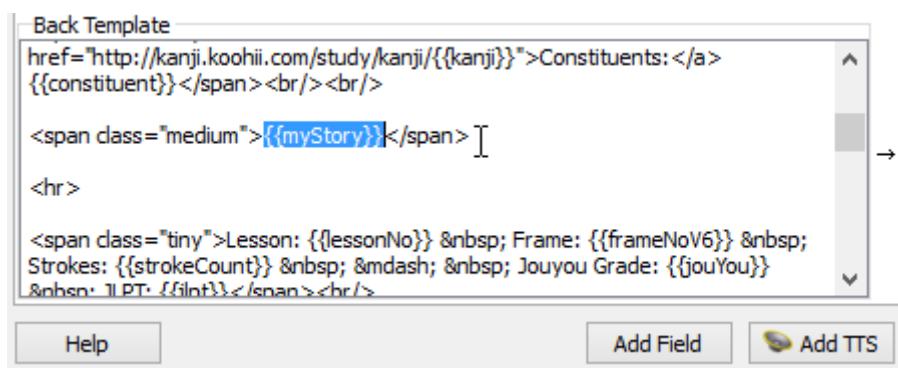
This will bring up a very scary look at the html going into your cards’ formatting:



Looking at the “Back Template,” scroll down until you see “{{koohiiStory1}}”:



Copy that, then scroll up and paste it where it says “{{myStory}}”:



After pasting “{{koohiiStory1}}” in place of “{{myStory}}”, the back side of your

flashcards will automatically show the koohiiStory1 every time. It's the lazy studiers ultimate dream approach, I suppose.

*Lather. Rinse. Repeat... 2,131 Times.*



So now we've walked through the process of learning new kanji. If you're still feeling lost or confused about some of this, please don't hesitate to [email me](#). Sometimes I am painfully slow to respond, but I promise that I will get back to you eventually!

The next step is:

## 5. Repeat new-kanji-learning process 2,131 times.

If you're feeling like you're ready to dive headfirst into this, then go for it! The only thing left to do now is to finalize your attack plan. The main aspect of this will be decideing the time period that you're going to shoot for to get through this whole thing.

*Decide Your Challenge Time Period*

I called this the 97-Day Challenge, because it was originally designed for **learning 22 new kanji per day for 97 days, which would get you through all of the Jōyō Kanji.**

If you have the time and motivation, though, I think it's feasible to do up to 30 new kanji per day. This would get you through all 2,136 of the Joyo Kanji in about 72 days. I think trying to shoot for anything better than that would be a bad idea. 30 kanji per day is *a lot*, and you might burn out as soon as you have a couple of bad days.

If it takes you an average of 5 minutes to learn a new kanji, then that's only 12 per hour. Doing one hour of new kanji study per day this way would put you at 178 days! Yikes! **But if you could speed up to a 3-minute average for each new kanji, then you could get through 20 in one hour, and doing that every day would get you through all of the kanji in around 107 days**—a pretty short amount of time, if you put everything into perspective.

I'm going to list a table of possible daily goals and how long it would take to get through all of the Jōyō Kanji if you hit those goals *every single day*. Really, though, I think you should just start studying new cards without any time schedules or rules for the first few days and try to get a sense of what a comfortable pace is for you personally. **This is not a race. It's an endurance test.** You could run 100 miles at top speed and then drop dead. Or, you could walk quickly for 1,000 miles and not die. And maybe some awesome people can even maintain a light jog for that amount of time (given breaks for food, friends, and lovers). In short, **go at a pace that you won't quit**. That's all you need to succeed.

Here's a fun chart, too. Get excited!

Kanji Per Day	Total # of Days	AVG Minutes to Learn 1 Kanji			
		1	2	5	7
Required Minutes of Daily Study					
30	71	30	60	150	210
29	74	29	58	145	203
28	76	28	56	140	196
27	79	27	54	135	189
26	82	26	52	130	182
25	85	25	50	125	175
24	89	24	48	120	168
23	93	23	46	115	161
22	97	22	44	110	154
21	102	21	42	105	147
20	107	20	40	100	140
19	112	19	38	95	133
18	119	18	36	90	126
17	126	17	34	85	119
16	134	16	32	80	112
15	142	15	30	75	105
14	153	14	28	70	98
13	164	13	26	65	91
12	178	12	24	60	84
11	194	11	22	55	77
10	214	10	20	50	70
9	237	9	18	45	63
8	267	8	16	40	56
7	305	7	14	35	49
6	356	6	12	30	42
5	427	5	10	25	35

It's fun to imagine that charts like this are accurate, but realistically we're probably way off. For example, this is just talking about the time required for learning new kanji. It doesn't take into account the amount of time we'll be spending each day as we review kanji we've already learned, which we'll talk about next.

### *Prioritizing Your Study Flow*

That chart above details how long it would take to learn all of the kanji if you learned a certain amount of them regularly on a daily basis. The truth is, though, that **you don't have to learn new kanji every day if you don't feel like it**. Everyone has their own rhythms. Maybe you can only get to new kanji on the weekend, or weekdays before/after work. That's cool. It's not a big deal if you don't learn new kanji every day, **as long as you are still consistently studying new kanji and making progress**. Slow progress is better than no progress, right?

But please be careful. Because review cards are not so kind. That's why the next item is:

**6. Review kanji flashcards every day.**

Every day, before you learn a single new kanji, you need to review the kanji that you have already studied in order to ensure that you have not forgotten them. That's why, earlier, I told you to set your Anki preferences so that new cards show after review cards. Review cards are 2,136 times more important than new cards.

**Do every single review card every single day.** This is so important, and it's the only way to avoid a painful death caused by Anki Avalanche.

## Anki Avalanche: How I Lost 2 Years' Worth of Japanese

Did you know that 1 in 250 million people are killed by fallen satellites? You don't think it's going to be you. You think, I don't even know anyone that's been killed by a satellite! But then, there are you are, walking to tennis practice, and BAM! Satellite on your face and you're dead. Or, you might have been dead if I hadn't just warned you about it.

Well, no one ever warned me about the Anki Avalanche. I didn't even know that it existed!

It was 2010. I had just left Japan because I'd run out of money, and I was living at my parents' house. I was a lost, unemployed college graduate, and I had no idea what I was doing with my life. All of my friends seemed to be getting good jobs and moving forward. Meanwhile, I was blowing all of my savings living in Tokyo and poring through texts about the Japanese language. **I'd been studying for almost two years**, and I had absolutely nothing to show for it.

So, I went one day without reviewing my Anki cards. Maybe I had like 80 review cards due (about 20 minutes of study time back then). I don't really remember. Then I let two days go by, and 80 cards became 150 cards due for review. A week passed, and I think it was up to 500-something.

And the avalanche destroyed me. After a few months, Anki was telling me that around 4,000 cards were due for review. Obviously that's impossible, I figured. And like that, I gave up on the Japanese language. **I quit studying Japanese completely.**

This is why **you need to do all of your review cards every day**. Even if you're in a rut. Because as long as you're still reviewing those cards every day, then you won't lose the investment that you've put into this. And eventually, **the value of that investment will pull you out of your rut**, and you'll start moving forward again.

This happened to me just last year with Spanish, actually. I had been studying for half a year or so when I just lost all of my motivation. And, for the most part, I totally quit

learning Spanish. Except, **I still did my *review cards* on Anki every day.** Fast forward to about a month ago, when I suddenly started getting back into my studies with a renewed vigor. It was so liberating to “start” studying with over 3,000 mature review cards up to date in my Anki deck. I’d been reviewing them every day even though I’d lost all of my interest in Spanish. I mean, after all, it only took like 10-15 minutes to get through them every day. So why not? **And it’s really paying off now.**

Even if you are not engaged, just look at the screen of your phone or computer and click “Good” for every review card. Things will still work out this way, because later when you’re feeling more motivated, Anki will help you pick out which cards are not “Good,” which cards you should actually take a fresh look at again.

**Please review your cards every day.** Do not get hit by the Anki Avalanche.

So, to recap, the rule is:

***Study review cards every day; study new cards if you have time.***

Enjoy yourself and keep moving...

### *Sticking With It for 97 Days*

If you were ever going to step up and really put some serious, concentrated effort into your studies, now is the time. Phase #2 is the biggest barrier between you and Japanese fluency. We just need to get past it.

But sticking with this for 97 days (if you’re doing 22 new kanji per day) is a serious commitment. Here are some more tactics that might help us stick to that commitment...

### *Find Your Study Sanctuary*

For the course of this 97 days, you’re going to need to find a time and place to do your daily studying for at least one hour.

Back when I went through the kanji challenge, I went to my favorite coffee shop every single morning. Usually I went around 6am, when it was totally empty. Most mornings a

thin fog was hanging in the air. The lights were dim. People were calm, and I had a delicious coffee and a fresh, toasted bagel with cream cheese. **It was my favorite time of day.** The ambiance was perfect. The food and drinks were perfect. And it was the place that I turned into my study sanctuary. Every morning, I sat down with that coffee and that bagel, and I didn't leave the coffee shop until I'd learned all of the new kanji for that day.

Most likely, your study sanctuary will be different. Maybe you don't like coffee. Or (more likely) maybe you don't like waking up before 6am. Or maybe you work mornings and it's not feasible to study before work. I was working evenings at a restaurant back then, so it was feasible for me. What's feasible for you might be at home, or in your car, or at the public library. The key is to find a study sanctuary that fits into your lifestyle.

### Qualities of a Good Study Sanctuary

- ✧ You can go there every day.
- ✧ It's a blocked off time in your schedule.
- ✧ You *enjoy* going there.
- ✧ You look forward to going there.
- ✧ It's peaceful (i.e. it's conducive to concentration).
- ✧ It has an internet connection.
- ✧ It's free from distractions.

Maybe you've heard the phrase that goes something like this: "If you don't like exercising, it just means that you haven't found the right type of exercise for you yet." I think that the same can be said of studying Japanese. We just have to trick our idiot brains into enjoying it.

For example, I absolutely loved going to coffee shops, but the idea of studying Japanese kind of freaked me out, because every time I thought about it I put pressure on myself, felt stressed, and wanted to quit. In order to avoid those negative feelings, I had to focus on the extremely enjoyable process of going to a coffee shop and studying and ignore the extremely stressful process of pressuring myself to succeed. Studying at a coffee shop was also the only time in my daily life that I listened to music, because whenever I was in my car, or running, or going for walks I was always listening to [JapanesePod101](#). Seeing as how I'm a human, I love music. So I wanted to listen to music. So I wanted to go to the

coffee shop. So I wanted to study Japanese. I was creating a series of rules that formed into enjoyable, positive study motivators.

The hierarchy of rules that formed my study sanctuary looked like this:

- Rules
  - ✓ Every time I go to the coffee shop, I have to study Japanese.
  - ✓ I cannot leave the coffee shop until I finish my flashcards for the day.
  - ✓ I can only listen to music at the coffee shop. I can't listen to it anywhere else.
- Mental Process
  - ✧ I want delicious coffee and a bagel! I love coffee and bagels!
    - So let's go to my favorite coffee shop.
    - So let's study Japanese.
  - ✧ I want to listen to music! I love listening to music!
    - So let's go to my favorite coffee shop.
    - So let's study Japanese.
  - ✧ I hate living with my parents. I need to get out of the house.
    - So let's go to my favorite coffee shop.
    - So let's study Japanese.

In time, my brain started to think that studying Japanese was fun. It was something that seemed intrinsically positive and exciting. I wanted to study Japanese every day, because it gave me that relaxed, drinking-a-coffee-and-listening-to-awesome-music good feeling. Just writing about it here, I want to put on my headphones and drift away into hours of studying. It is my sanctuary, my place of peace. I am so happy when I go there.

That is the kind of study sanctuary that I want you to search for.

### *Focus on the Habit*

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This was one of the assignments in Phase #1:

### **Study Habit Assignment**

So, in Phase #2, I'm going to talk about a daily study routine. You don't need to worry about it yet, but as a little bit of preparation it might be a good idea to think about and **write down a list of your deeply ingrained, enjoyable habits**. Then put stars by the ones that you do every day.

Did any of you actually do the assignment? If so, you're awesome and you get a golden star. If not, then that's chill, too. We can just do it now.

Above, when I was listing the qualities of a good study sanctuary, I wrote: **You can go there every day**. That's because we need to turn your study habits into a reliable routine. We don't want to waste willpower working up the motivation to start studying. It should be something that you just do without even thinking about. No, it won't be like that at the start. But if you do it in the same exact way at the same exact time every single day, then it will become a habit, and it will almost be like second nature to you.

For me, my study habits only ever stick when they're the first thing that I do in the morning. Recently, for example, I've been working on writing projects when I first wake up, then doing my flashcards in the evening, and it's 100 times more difficult than doing them in the evening. I suppose because it's such a simple routine: Wake up → Study.

But your study time might be a long lunch break at work, or just after you've finished dinner (if you eat dinner in the same place at the same time every night).

**We're not trying to form a new routine. We're just trying to add studying flashcards to a routine that you already have.** I wake up every morning, so that's a very easy routine for me to have.

So if you can, try to take one of your daily habits and append your flashcard study to it. If you manage to study the kanji at the same time, in the same way, every single day, then your studies will also flow very nicely into Phase #3.

Just please don't turn this into a task. If you find that you have negative feelings about the

study habit that you're trying to create (e.g. "Ugh, I really don't feel like studying today!") then please try to take a deep look at why you don't want to study: Why does it feel like a chore? Why do you have negative feelings about it? Why is it hard to do it at this particular time of day? What do you dislike about the actual process of studying the flashcards? These are all barriers to creating an enjoyable routine. And your routine *must* be enjoyable, because if it's not enjoyable, then it won't become a routine.

### *Get Your Grit On*

I read [this really awesome article](#) on grit recently, and I thought that it could definitely apply to language learning. I probably sound like a broken record talking about how we need to make studying into an enjoyable, routine process full of flowers and sexy anime girls. But there's no sugarcoating the fact that this will be difficult. This will be work. This will require grit and resilience.

In that article above, you'll find a really awesome (scientific) exploration of why some people stick it out when others throw in the towel. I recommend reading the whole thing, but for those who are way too excited about learning Japanese to go look at it, I'll take a quote from when he sums up the factors that contribute to grit:

#### [A Navy SEAL Explains 8 Secrets To Grit And Resilience](#)

What we can learn from James, the SEALs and the research on how to have grit:

1. **Purpose and meaning.** It's easier to be persistent when what we're doing is tied to something personally meaningful.
2. **Make it a game.** It's the best way to stay in a competitive mindset without stressing yourself out.
3. **Be confident — but realistic.** See the challenges honestly but believe in your own ability to take them on.
4. **Prepare, prepare, prepare.** Grit comes a lot easier when you've done the work to make sure you're ready.
5. **[For #5-8, Please read the original article, below.]**
  - Eric Barker,
  - from "[A Navy SEAL Explains 8 Secrets To Grit And Resilience](#)"
  - from [Barking Up The Wrong Tree](#)

That advice sounds a lot like what we're doing here, don't you think? We got this, yo. Easy peasy Japanesy.

### *Don't Make Kanji the Enemy*



Have you ever gone on a road trip before? In my experience, there are only two types of people on road trips: (1) How-Much-Longer people (HMLs... only, Japanese people can't always distinguish between the 'F' sound and the 'H' sound, so I'm going to call these people FMLs) and (2) Really-Awesome-Drive people (RADs).

Say, for example, that you're driving from San Diego to Las Vegas (which, for some reason, I've done way too many times). If you're fast, it's about a five-hour drive. And no, there's not a whole lot to see between San Diego and Las Vegas. It's mostly just desert. And the desert stops being interesting after about five seconds.

However, I've found that my experience of this drive is totally variable. Sometimes it feels like the longest drive in the world. Other times, I don't get burned out by it at all, and the time just flies by. I haven't conducted any scientific studies on this or anything, but I'm pretty sure that there is one huge reason for this: The other people in the car.

If you drive to Vegas with a bunch of FMLs, then this is going to be a long, miserable drive, and you're going to be dying to get out of the car. **If you yourself have an FML mindset, then you are going to be a miserable person, too, and I don't want to go to Vegas with you.**

On the other hand, if everyone in the car is a RAD person, then you're gonna have a RAD time. And if you yourself have a RAD mindset, then you won't even care how much longer it is until you get to Vegas.

I think getting through the kanji is pretty much the same way. You can have a RAD mindset, or you can have a FML mindset. It's up to you.

#### **FML Mindset:**

- There are so many kanji! Too many. I hate Japanese people. FML.
- I have to make *another* kanji story? This is so lame. FML.
- Is it even possible for me to get through all of this? FML.
- Even if I get through all of these, I still won't know the readings of the kanji. What's the point?! FML.
- It's 7pm, and I still haven't done my flashcards. FML.
- I haven't reviewed my flashcards yet. I'm dreading it! FML.
- I forget this kanji character's meaning every time! This is impossible! FML.
- I can't do this. FML.

#### **RAD Mindset:**

- ✧ I just learned a Japanese character! This is awesome! RAD.
- ✧ I'm using my brain in new ways and creating new neural pathways, making me a smarter person. RAD.
- ✧ If I can get through this, I can brag to everyone. RAD.
- ✧ If I can get through this, I'll be so proud of myself. RAD.
- ✧ I can't wait to learn some new kanji today. It's so cool to swim around in my thoughts and memories, engraving these beautiful characters into my mind. RAD.
- ✧ I'm exhausted. It's 7pm, and I still haven't done my flashcards. I'm stoked to chill out and look at some Japanese ridiculousness. RAD.

- ❖ It's so hard for me to remember this character. I forget it every time. I wonder if there is some way for me to get it to stick in my mind. Maybe I can dig a little deeper to make an even more awesome mnemonic that sticks. RAD.
- ❖ Nope. I'm still forgetting this character every time. Oh well. Who cares. Eventually it will stick, because I do Anki every day. Wow, this is a breeze. RAD.
- ❖ I can't believe I'm actually doing this. RAD.

**Kanji don't have to be a burden or a chore or a nightmare.** Part of getting through the kanji is about developing a greater love and appreciation for this language. There is a deep history in these characters. They go back hundreds and hundreds of years, and they are a testimony to mankind's effort to share their knowledge with his/her contemporaries and descendants.

While we are on the topic of developing an appreciation for kanji (and Japanese in general), there is a cool quote that I'd like to share:

***“Passion is a volume knob, not a light switch.”***

– [Cameron Dare](#)

You can't expect to simply flip some switch that makes studying Japanese fun and exciting for you. Yeah, some of you will be gifted with that switch from the beginning, but a lot of us don't have it. **And yet, if you give love, attention, and effort to this challenge, if you really put your heart into it, I guarantee you that you will develop a passion for this language.** You will slowly turn up the volume on your interest in Japanese. And at some point, it won't feel like a chore at all. You'll get to chill and drink beer with friends speaking Japanese. You'll get to relax in bed with an interesting Japanese novel or manga. You'll get to go through marathon sessions of anime without melting your brain even the slightest bit.

You might not like studying Japanese at first, but (if you stick with it) over time you can come to appreciate this language. So instead of making the kanji into some enemy that must be toppled, try to have a RAD mindset, and you might actually enjoy the 97-Day Challenge.

## *Focus on the Awesomeness*

Back with a vengeance from my original post on the kanji, we have:

### *8 Reasons Learning the Kanji Will Be Awesome*

1. You'll practically know Chinese.



2. You'll be able to read ads in Japan.



3. And signs warning you not to be a pervert.



4. You'll know what food you're eating.



5. Giant Japanese crows will be nice to you.



6. Some signs will seem less rude.



福服 / ふくふく, pronounced *fuku fuku*, is actually a play on words (well, on kanji), and it means “Blessed Clothing.”

7. You'll feel safer.



And, perhaps most important...

8. Hawks won't steal your lunch. (I wasn't so lucky that day.)

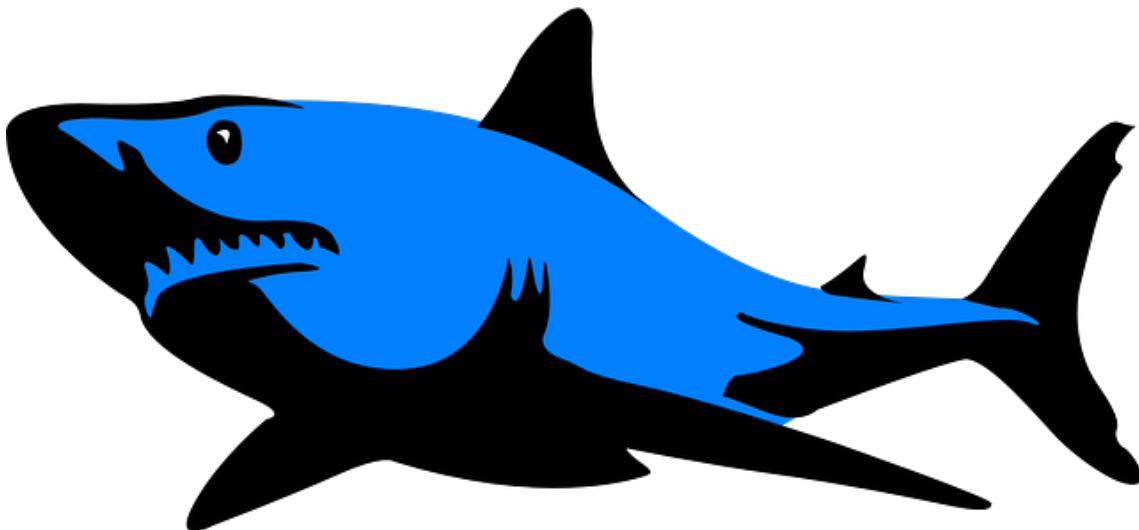


(Seriously, a hawk stole my pizza dumpling right out of my hand. It was both incredible and tragic, and a Japanese lady laughed at me.)

The sign says “Watch Out for Hawks,” and the hawk is saying, “I eat bento boxes, dango, ice cream—everything!”

## *Keep Swimming*

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Just keep at it. I thought that learning all of the Jōyō kanji seemed impossible. Even when I was up to 1,800 or so, I still thought it seemed impossible. Whether I had 1,000 left to learn or 200 left to learn, it just seemed impossible.

So I had to keep my head down. I had to take it one story at a time and remember that **great accomplishments only come from persistent efforts**. When I finally lifted my head up, at the end of it all, it was a feeling of joy—relief—that I've never been able to adequately describe to anyone before.

You won't regret it. And yes, you can do this.

### *1 Kanji at a Time*

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Just take it 1 kanji at a time. Don't look forward. Look at the one kanji. Some day in the future, that kanji will be the last kanji. It doesn't matter when that day is. All that matters is knowing that such a day exists, and it will come eventually.

## *Kanji Challenge Recap*

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- 1. Download Anki.**
  - ✧ Instructions [here](#).
- 2. Download the Nihongoshark.com Kanji Deck.**
  - ✧ Instructions and info about this deck are [here](#).
- 3. Set Anki's preferences.**
  - ✧ Instructions for setting preferences are [here](#).
- 4. Start learning new kanji.**
  - ✧ Instructions for learning the first 4 kanji are [here](#).
- 5. Repeat new-kanji-learning process 2,131 times.**
  - ✧ Details and instructions [here](#).
- 6. Review kanji flashcards every day.**
  - ✧ Instructions on how to realize this goal [here](#).

# PHASE #2 COMPLETE!



(Yes, this is real life. You just completed Phase #2.)

## *Phase #2 – Checklist (Week #2 – Week #16)*

**Purpose:** Learn to Read and Pronounce Japanese Characters

**Time to Complete:** 15 Weeks (3.5 Months)

### **Ninja Brain Prep #1 – Learn Japanese Pronunciation**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 30 Minutes)*

- Read the [Pronouncing Japanese](#) section a few times.
- Keep that information in mind as you proceed to Brain Prep #2.

### **Ninja Brain Prep #2 – Learn Hiragana & Katakana**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 1 Week)*

- Get a free app or program for learning hiragana and katakana.
- Learn the reading and pronunciation of every single character.
- Learn to write the characters (recommended, but you don't really need to if you don't feel like it; personally, I *never* handwrite any Japanese).
- Keep using your chosen app or program every single day until you know all of the characters like the back of your hand.

### **Ninja Brain Prep #3 – Learn All 2,136 Joyo Kanji**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 97 Days)*

- Download Anki.
- Download the Nihongoshark.com Kanji Deck.
- Set Anki's preferences.
- Start learning new kanji.
- Repeat new-kanji-learning process 2,131 times.
- Review kanji flashcards every day.

# PHASE #3 – LAY YOUR FLUENCY FOUNDATION

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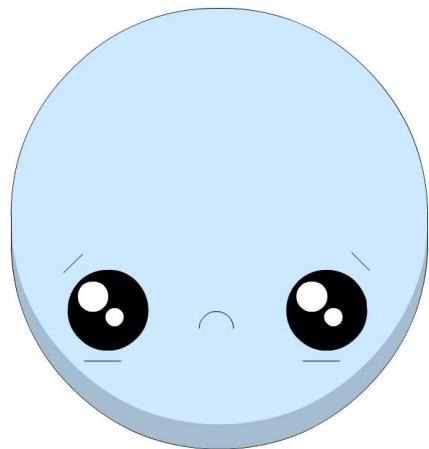
Although you will learn a lot of Japanese in Phase #2, it's essentially just prep work. You're picking up the mental faculties that will allow you to fly through your acquisition of Japanese.

If we were flying to the moon, for example, the first thing we would need to do is gather materials and information—anything that we might need to know about how to get to the moon. This is Phase #1. Then we'd need to build our spaceship. This is Phase #2. And now that it's complete, all that's left is the actual trip—Phase #3. So let's talk about takeoff.

This phase will take up the bulk of your first year's Japanese studies. Assuming you've made it through Phase #2, you've already learned all of the kanji and are an amazing all-around person. You've already switched out all of your music and TV shows for

Japanese podcasts. You've already set up your computer to avoid distractions and help you learn Japanese. You've already got a stack of grammar study materials just waiting for you to dive into them. You've already laid all the groundwork necessary in order for you to become fluent in Japanese at an incredible rate.

### *The Bad News: This is a lot of work.*



I'm just going to warn you now: Like Phase #2, it will be incredibly hard to make it through Phase #3 without hitting any major speed bumps. It's difficult, because it's going to require that you study—and complete—certain items *every single day*. No weekends off. No holidays. No exceptions.

That said, feel free to adjust the goals and landmarks that I present here so that they fit with your personal approach to Japanese. Yes, it will require an

enormous amount of discipline to complete everything in this guide. However, we don't want to burn out from overburdening ourselves. Only you know how much time you can truly dedicate to your Japanese studies on a day-to-day basis. I can tell you one thing, though, a principle that is underlying every page of this book: **No one becomes fluent in a language by studying intermittently.** To become a master of anything you have to do it consistently over a long period of time. In fact, "master" is probably the wrong word, because we're not trying to control anything. Rather, we want to form a symbiotic relationship with Japanese. We want to integrate it into our lives, to not only challenge us, but to interest and entertain us as well.

### *The Good News: It's going to get easier.*



It certainly might not feel this way, but once you enter Phase #3, every progressive day of studying will be easier than the day that came before it.

I remember a few years ago, I was studying for JLPT N2, and I was feeling pretty discouraged about the sheer number of grammatical constructions possible

in Japanese. “How am I supposed to remember all of these?!” I thought. In other words, I was being a total Negative Nancy, because I didn’t feel up to the challenge.

Fast forward to today. If I look through a JLPT N2 grammar book, the grammar functions seem quite simple. I almost forget what was so difficult about them back then, because now the meaning seems quite obvious for a lot of things. Now my increased overall understanding of Japanese makes it much easier and faster for me to process new bits of grammar, vocabulary, slang, colloquialisms, kanji combos, etc. I didn’t realize it back then, but this “processing speed” had been increasing ever since I committed to studying Japanese on a daily basis over a long period of time, ever since I formed...

## The Almighty Study Chain

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The Study Chain System is designed around the concept that missing one day (of studying, for example) makes it much more likely that you will miss two days. Missing two days makes it more likely that you’ll miss three days. Missing three days makes it likely that you’ll give up completely.

I first got the idea for this study system a couple of years ago when I read this article on

Lifehacker: "[How Seinfeld's Productivity Secret Fixed My Procrastination Problem.](#)"

Since then, I've seen it reiterated over and over again in books on habit change, life coach blogs, etc.

The general idea is that you **buy or print a monthly or annual calendar**, and each day you have a few recurring tasks that you must do. And if you manage to complete all of the required tasks for a day, then you put a big [blue] X over that day in your calendar. For example, if today were January 12, you'd want your calendar to look like this:

JANUARY							FEBRUARY							MARCH						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
X	X	X	X	X	X	X														
X	X	X	X	X	X	X														
13	14	15	16	17	18															
19	20	21	22	23	24	25														
26	27	28	29	30	31															
APRIL							MAY							JUNE						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5															
6	7	8	9	10	11	12														
13	14	15	16	17	18	19														
20	21	22	23	24	25	26														
27	28	29	30																	
JULY							AUGUST							SEPTEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6														
7	8	9	10	11	12	13														
14	15	16	17	18	19	20														
21	22	23	24	25	26	27														
28	29	30																		

The motivation here is that you don't want to break that chain of X's. Something about the OCD nature of humans seems to make this more motivating.

Our chain is going to consist of 3 items:

1. Flashcards
2. Listening Practice
3. Grammar and/or Speaking Practice

Every time we do all three of these, we can write a Blue X on our calendars (or whatever color you want). But, if we miss some items one day, we put a Red X. So a pretty successful month for January would look something like this:

I have three Red X's, but other than that I have **all blue X's** This means that on every day with a Blue X, I (1) reviewed my flashcards, (2) listened to audio lessons, and (3) practiced grammar and/or speaking. In other words, **it was a successful day!**

On the three **days with Red X's I failed** to do one or more of the daily study chain items.

A Red X is not such a big deal. In other words, I give myself a pass for slipping up one day. Nothing more than a small slap on the wrist—that hideous red on my beautiful ocean-blue chain of X's. However, **if I miss two days in a row, then I can't put any X's on my calendar at all**. So my calendar would have ugly, disgusting gaps in it, like this:

If you see in this calendar, there is a Red X on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February. Valentine's Day. Maybe I have a very demanding girlfriend. Or maybe I drank myself into a lonely stupor and forgot to study Japanese. Think of any excuse you want, but this marks a day that

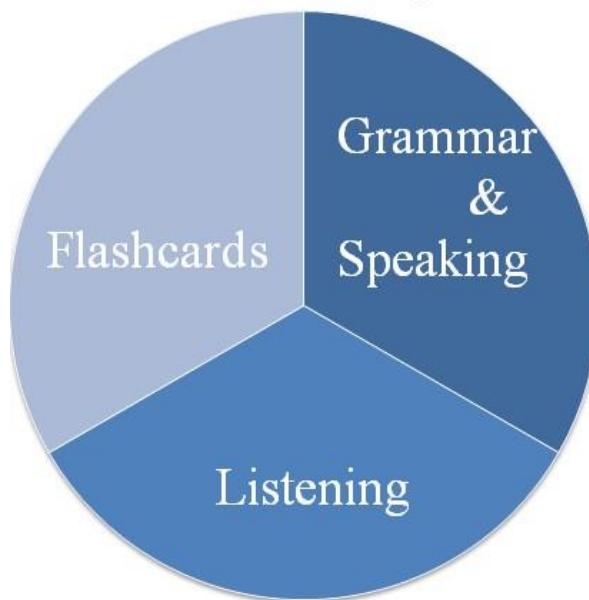
chain items were not studied. Then, even worse, I didn't study February 15<sup>th</sup> either. So the 15<sup>th</sup> gets no X at all!! \*Failure\* \*Pain\* \*Disgrace\*

I like to think of "don't break the chain," of Phase #3, as a kind of reward system. **Each day's small amount of studying is building to something grand and magnificent: Total fluency.** But it's hard to keep that vision in mind. We humans are weak creatures, prone to favoring immediate wants over future wants. I'm going to start studying tomorrow. I'm going to start losing weight on New Year's Day. Goals like these are fun, because we get to imagine ourselves achieving them without actually doing anything right now. Then, a year later, we end up in the same spot we were in before... and it sucks!

We can beat this by rewarding ourselves with those X's on our calendar, by building a chain. And as the chain of Blue X's (or whatever color you choose) grows, you will really start to appreciate the magnificence of what you're doing. That's why I like the idea of doing this with an annual calendar, like the one above. It can really help you to **visualize just how much work you've put into this endeavor**, and after a while of consistently performing, just looking at a long string of Blue X's will be motivating all on its own.

If you can just build a long chain of items, you are guaranteed fluency. It's okay if a few Red X's pop up here and there, but as long as you don't see any numbers, everything is okay in the world.

## DAILY CHAIN STUDY ITEMS



### Phase #3 Assignment

- Go online and find a monthly or yearly calendar that you like the look of.
- Print it out.
- Buy or set aside two colored markers: Blue and Red; or Your Favorite Color and Your Most Hated Color; any two colors.
- Start marking (Blue) X's on days that you study all three chain items, (Red) X's the first time you miss one or more chain items, and No X's every time you go two or more days without studying all three chain items (Hint: This should never happen).

### Chain Item #1 – Flashcards

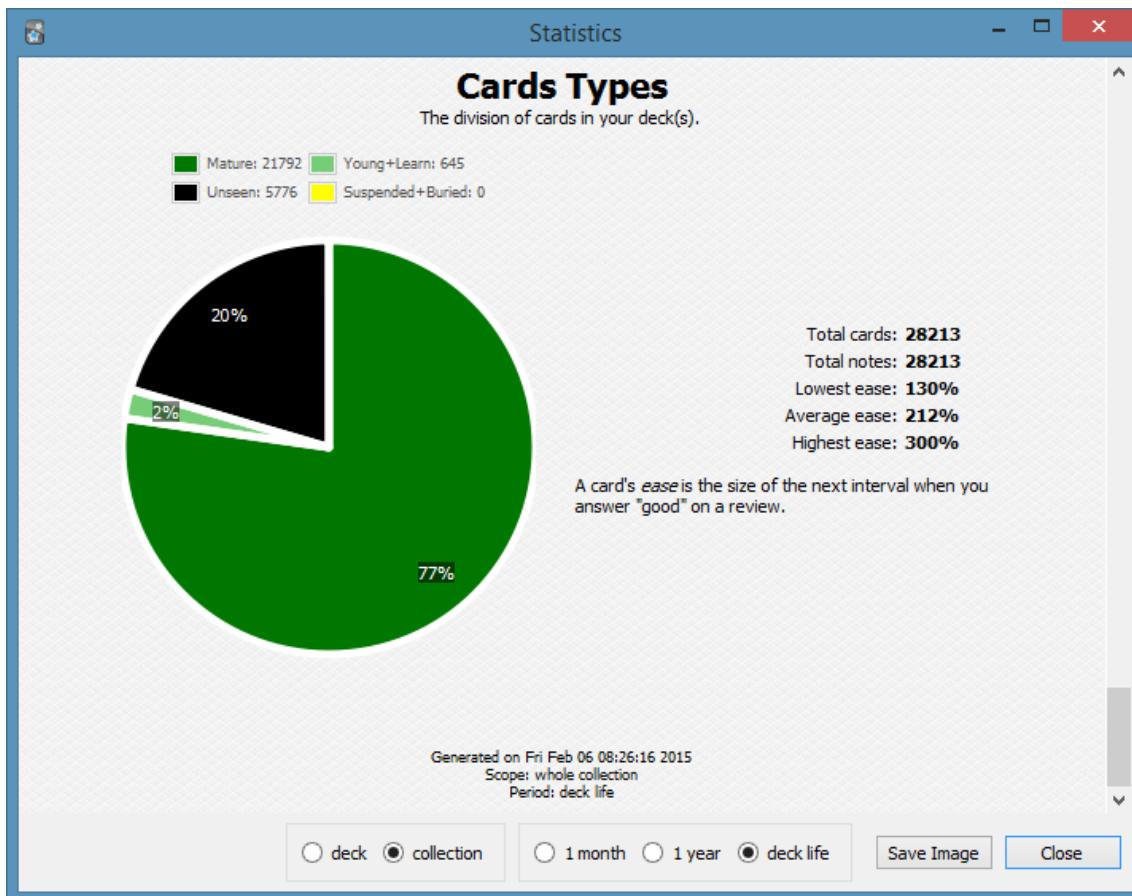
Like I said in Phase #2, when talking about studying the kanji, **reviewing your flashcards is something that you must do every day**. There are going to be days when you are hungover, or sick, or depressed, or at Disneyland, or on a tropical beach, or up in the mountains far from civilization. You should still be doing (at least your review) flashcards on these days.

Sometimes I hear people say that SRS programs (like Anki) are overrated. They say that memorizing vocab can only take you so far. Maybe that's true. But all I know is that right

now, at the moment of writing this sentence, my Anki decks look like this:

- ❖ Japanese Flashcards:
  - 17,357 Mature Cards (i.e. cards that are completely memorized)
  - 245 Young Cards (i.e. cards that I am still in the process of memorizing)
- ❖ Spanish Flashcards:
  - 3,374 Mature Cards
  - 399 Young Cards
- ❖ Portuguese Flashcards:
  - 1,071 Mature Cards
  - 1 Young Card
- ❖ **Total Flashcards:**
  - **21,792 Mature Cards**
  - **645 Young Cards**

There is something so reassuring about Anki. It's crazy to look at that list and realize that I have memorized around 22,000 vocabulary words spread across three languages. The main reason that this seems so surreal is that **I don't feel like I'm studying a lot**. I just wake up in the morning, spend about 30-45 minutes doing flashcards, then get on with my day. And before I knew it, doing that every single day led me to this situation I am in now.



Studying flashcards is by far the most important item in the chain. Actually, **this might be the most important item in this entire study plan.**

*Build → Learn → Maintain*

For your flashcards, you will always be doing three things:

1. Building
2. Learning
3. Maintaining

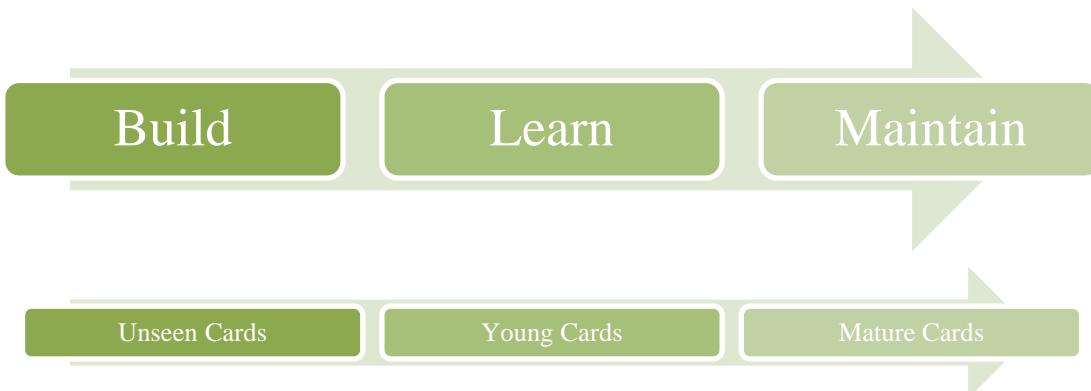
**Building** refers to adding new flashcards (words, grammar points, example sentences, etc.) to your Anki decks. **Learning** is what happens when you first encounter those cards. After you first encounter them, they will become “Young” flashcards, and you will see them relatively frequently. In time, Anki will determine that you have completely memorized these flashcards, and they will be categorized as “Mature” flashcards.

**Maintaining** refers to keeping these “Mature” cards in our memory by periodically reviewing them (in a systematic manner).

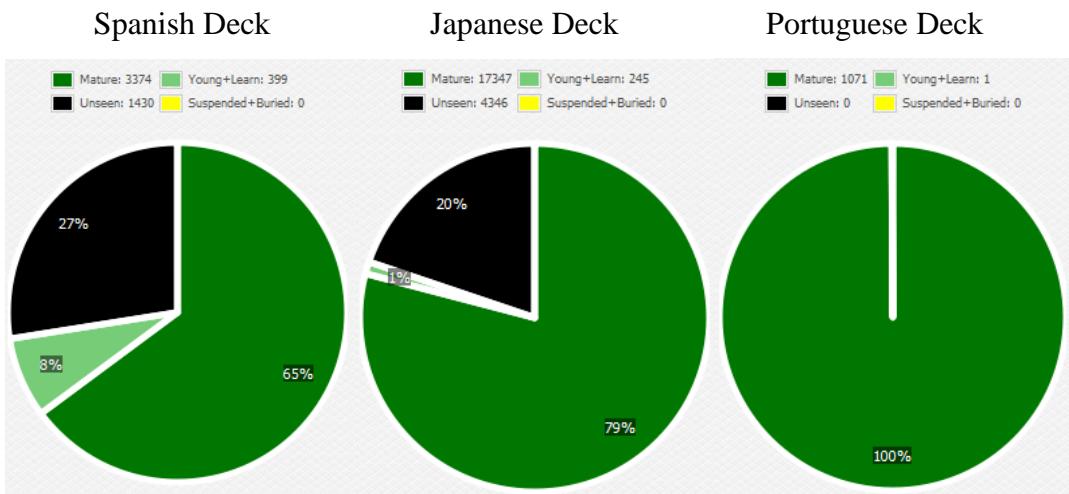
If you look at that image above, it says that I have 5,776 Unseen Cards. These are cards that I have already built (because they're in my decks), but I still haven't learned them, because I've never actually "studied" them in Anki. That is, Anki has not yet shown me these cards and said, hey, learn this!

There are also 645 "Young" cards. These are cards that Anki has shown me recently. I have already started studying them, but it's still too soon to say that I've memorized them. These make up for the bulk of my daily studies, because Anki shows them to me frequently, because I'm still prone to forgetting them.

Finally, I have 21,792 "Mature" cards. These are flashcards that I've finished learning and totally memorized. They make up a small percentage of my daily studies, because only Anki needs to periodically check that I still haven't forgotten them.



Currently in my daily studies, I am trying to learn 30 new Spanish words, 12 new Japanese words and 0 new Portuguese words. Because of this, the number and proportion of young cards in my Spanish deck is higher than the number and proportion of young cards in my Japanese deck and much higher than the number and proportion of young cards in my Portuguese deck:



- ✧ Spanish deck: 399 Young Cards; 11.8% of Studied Cards (399/3374)
- ✧ Japanese deck: 245 Young Cards; 1.4% of Studied Cards (245/17357)
- ✧ Portuguese deck: 1 Young Card; <0.1% of Total Cards (1/1071)

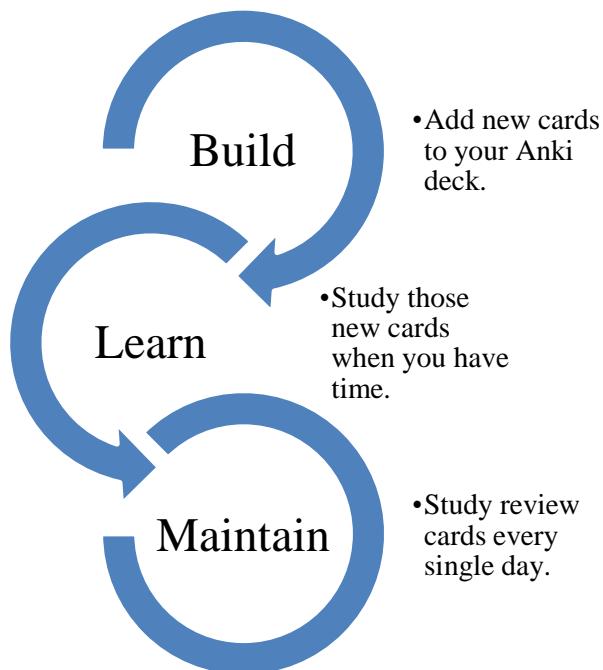
A great example of the power of Anki is that 1 Young Card I have in my Portuguese deck. It takes me about 1 minute to do my daily flashcards for Portuguese. Usually they are all very easy, because they are all Mature Cards. However, I must have recently forgotten one of those Mature Cards, so Anki dropped it down to “Young Card” status. Anki is making sure that I don’t forget any of those 1,071 cards. Long story short, I am maintaining my 1,000 word vocabulary by doing 1 minute of flashcards per day.

### *Maintain Your Vocabulary by Reviewing*

The reason I say that these flashcards are so important to focus on in your studies is, first and foremost, that they can help you retain words and kanji at an extremely accelerated rate. However, there is also another reason we need to give them extra attention: **It's very easy to fall behind on your Anki flashcards.**

You pick an ambitious number of new cards to study each day. You keep up just fine, but then you start having a hard time keeping up with all the cards that Anki is telling you are due for review on a daily basis, and before you know it you have 5,000 cards due for review *today*, a number you’ll never reach, and you’ve removed the intelligence from your ‘intelligent flashcards.’ Do not fall behind on your Anki flashcards. **If you fall behind on your Anki flashcards, you will not learn Japanese in 1 year.** So, if you notice you’re starting to fall behind on these, you’ll need to make it your #1 priority to get

caught up at whatever means necessary. That probably means you stop adding new cards, temporarily. Like I've said 100 times, review cards are always more important than new cards. By reviewing, we maintain the database of vocabulary in our brains, never forgetting it.



At some point in your studies, you may have a couple hundred cards that are due for review on a given day, which could take an hour or more to get through. If you happen to break the chain on that day, then the next day you'd have an even higher number of cards due, maybe enough to take a couple of hours, even. Then, if you miss a couple more days, you've got over 1,000 cards due today, and you simply stop studying them... which means you stop learning at an accelerated rate, which means you stop making progress to Japanese fluency.

This is why we make our flashcard quotas our #1 study priority.

### *Your Flashcard Decks*

Personally, I have a very systematic approach to the way that I build, learn, and maintain my flashcards decks. If you follow my system exactly, then you will need to have three flashcard decks in Anki. Here they are, in order of importance:

1. Your Kanji Deck
2. Your Personal Vocabulary Deck

### 3. Your Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Deck

So, we have one deck for kanji, one for vocabulary that you encounter in your daily studies and interaction with Japanese, and one pre-loaded deck of thousands of high-frequency vocabulary in it.

#### *Your Kanji Deck*

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This is the deck that we created together in Phase #2. Since studying the kanji will come before the studying in Phase #3, that means that your kanji deck will always have the highest priority.

#### *Your Personal Vocabulary Deck*

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In the old version of my e-book, this was the only type of vocabulary deck that I encouraged readers to make. The basic concept is simple: every time you hear a new word that you don't know, you should make a flashcard for it with an example sentence (preferably the sentence you heard it in for the first time).

There are two main benefits to creating a vocabulary deck for words that you encounter naturally. First, all of the words that you put into this deck will be highly relevant. You won't end up learning random words that don't apply to you, which is what always happens from studying generic vocabulary lists. Second, because the words that you put into this deck are relevant to your life, you're also more likely to remember them. Back in the kanji section, we talked about the power of spatial memories. In other words, our brains' proclivity to remember real-life experiences as opposed to abstract ideas. When you study vocabulary words that you have encountered in real life, it makes it much easier for you to remember that word.

The downside to creating your own personal vocabulary deck is that it tends to be overly time-consuming. I'll talk about some ways to save time as we create vocabulary cards for words we've encountered in real life, but even then the building of this deck will take longer than the building of your first and third Anki decks, both of which are automatically generated for you. Later on, we'll also look at a sort of hybrid version of the second and third decks, which is also a cool option.

## *Your Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Deck*

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Back when I was still a beginner of Japanese, I didn't use any pre-loaded decks. As such, I cannot fully testify to their level of effectiveness in learning and retaining new vocabulary long-term. Pre-loaded flashcard decks have come a long way, though, and the options available today are about 16,000 times more awesome than they were only a few years ago.

There are a lot of benefits to using a well-made, pre-loaded vocabulary deck. For example, the pre-loaded vocabulary deck that we're going to set up later has all of this packed inside of it:

1. Thousands of high-frequency vocabulary words.
  - Images to aid in the retention of the target Japanese word.
  - Example sentences in Japanese with their English translations.
  - Audio recordings of example sentences *by native speakers*.
  - Quick, streamlined setup.

Pretty awesome, right?

If I can think of any downside to pre-loaded vocabulary decks it's that the list of words is not going to be particularly relevant to your real life. That's a bummer, but when learning a language it's kind of hard to get around this kind of thing.

There are a lot of options for pre-loaded vocabulary decks. Later on in this section, I'll walk you through setting up the one that I recommend most, and I'll also provide some links to noteworthy decks.

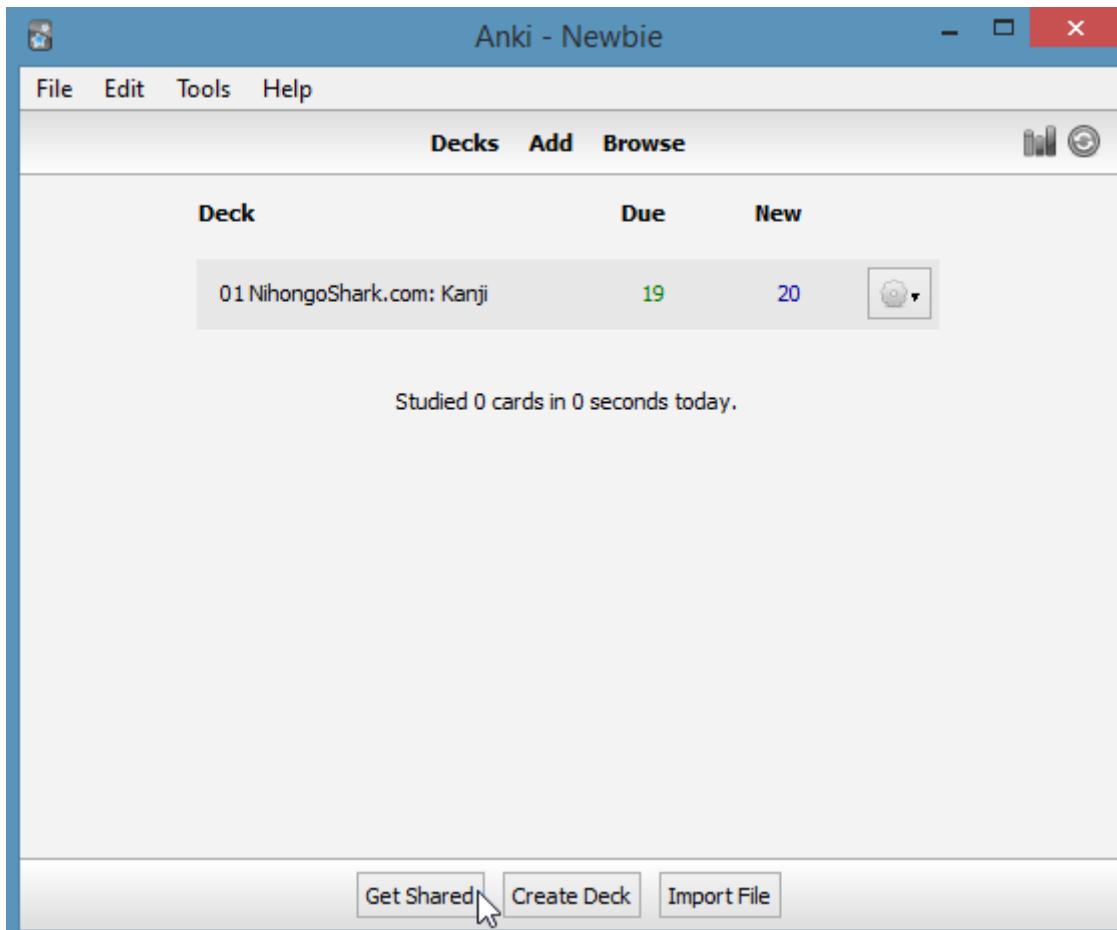
## *Setting Up Your Personal Vocabulary Deck*

The first thing we need to do is to set up an empty deck that you can put words into when you encounter them throughout your interaction with the world of Japanese. I think that as you study over time, you will probably develop a personal preference for the layout and styling of your deck. Until then, however, you can just use the template that I've created: The NihongoShark.com Blank Vocabulary Deck. Woohoo!

## Downloading the NihongoShark.com Blank Vocabulary Deck

To download the NihongoShark.com Blank Vocabulary Deck, go to [this page](#).

Alternatively, you can open Anki and click “Get Shared:”



This will take you to the Shared Decks page:

A screenshot of the Anki web interface at the URL <https://ankiweb.net/shared/decks/>. The page features the Anki logo at the top. Below it, there's a "Popular categories" section with "Languages" and "Art, sciences and trivia" subsections. The "Languages" section lists: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish. The "Art, sciences and trivia" section lists: Anatomy, Biology, Birds, Chemistry, Geography, Law, Math, Music, Pathology, Physics. A search bar is located at the top right. A message at the bottom says "Can't find what you're looking for? Try a search!" and "To share your own decks, please see [here](#)". At the very bottom, there are links for "Help", "About", and "Terms & Conditions".

In the Search box, type “nihongo shark” like this:



And magic:

The screenshot shows the Anki software interface. At the top, there is a search bar and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, the title 'Nihongo shark' is displayed. Under the title, there is a table with the following columns: 'Title', 'Stars', 'Modified', 'Notes', 'Audio', and 'Images'. The 'Title' row contains 'NihongoShark.com Blank Vocabulary Deck'. The 'Modified' row shows '2015-02-06'. The 'Notes' column has a value of '1', 'Audio' has '0', and 'Images' has '1'. At the bottom of the interface, there are links for 'Help', 'About', and 'Terms & Conditions'.

Clicking “Info” will bring us to [the deck’s page](#):

The screenshot shows the 'NihongoShark.com Blank Vocabulary Deck' page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Settings | Logout', 'Decks', 'Study', 'Add', 'Search', and 'More'. Below the navigation bar, there is a link '[< Back](#)'. The main title is 'NihongoShark.com Blank Vocabulary Deck'. To the right, it says 'Based on 0 ratings:' and shows a 5-star rating icon. Below the title, it says '<10kB Updated 2015-02-06'. The 'Description' section states: 'This is the personal vocabulary deck created by [NihongoShark.com](#)'. The 'Sample (from 1 notes)' section contains a table with the following data:

Target Japanese Word	怪しい
Target Word Reading	あやしい
Target Word's English Equivalent	suspicious; fishy; shady; questionable
Japanese Example Sentence	彼の証言には怪しいところがある。
English Translation	.....

At the bottom, we can click “Download:”

First Encounter	I don't remember.
Audio	
Notes	
Tags	

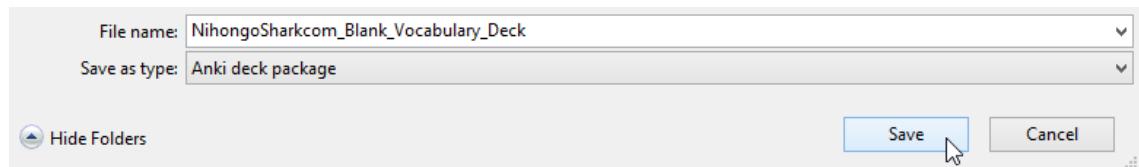
**Download** 

After the file is downloaded, double-click on it to open it in the desktop program.

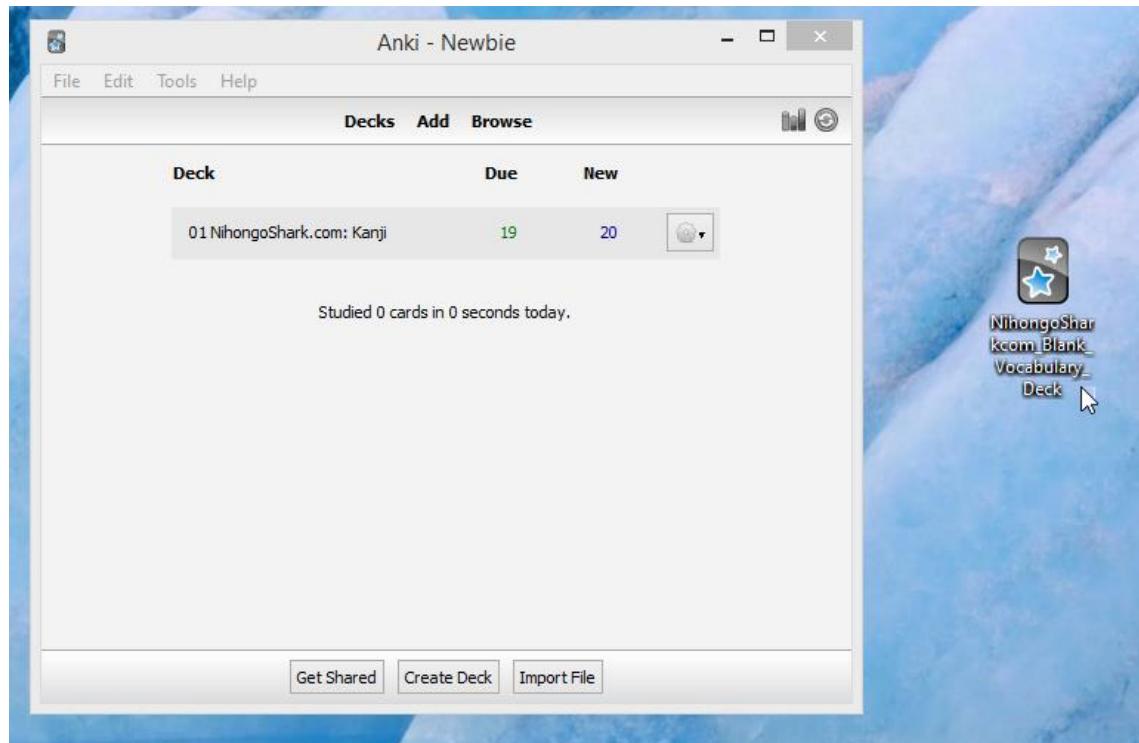
At this time, it is not possible to add shared decks directly to your AnkiWeb account - they need to be added from the desktop then synchronized to AnkiWeb.

**Remove**

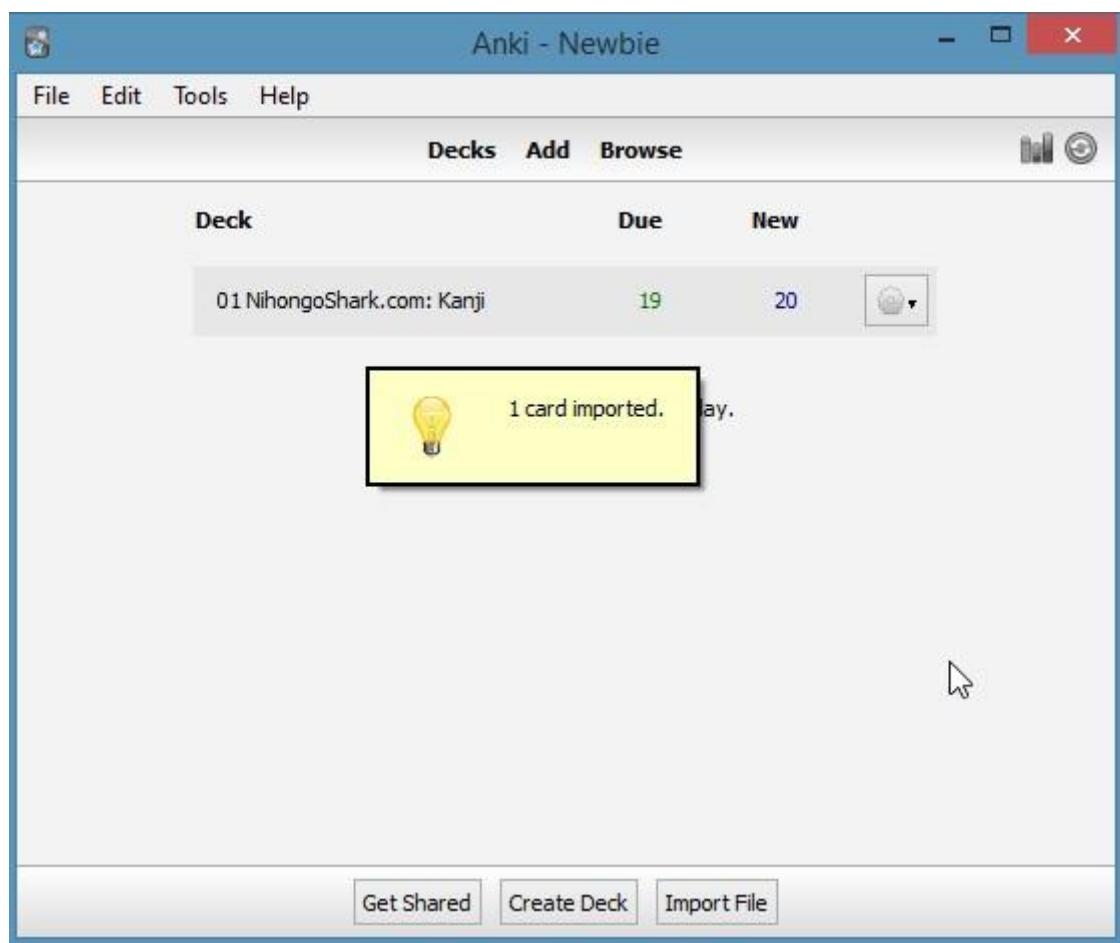
A download box will appear:



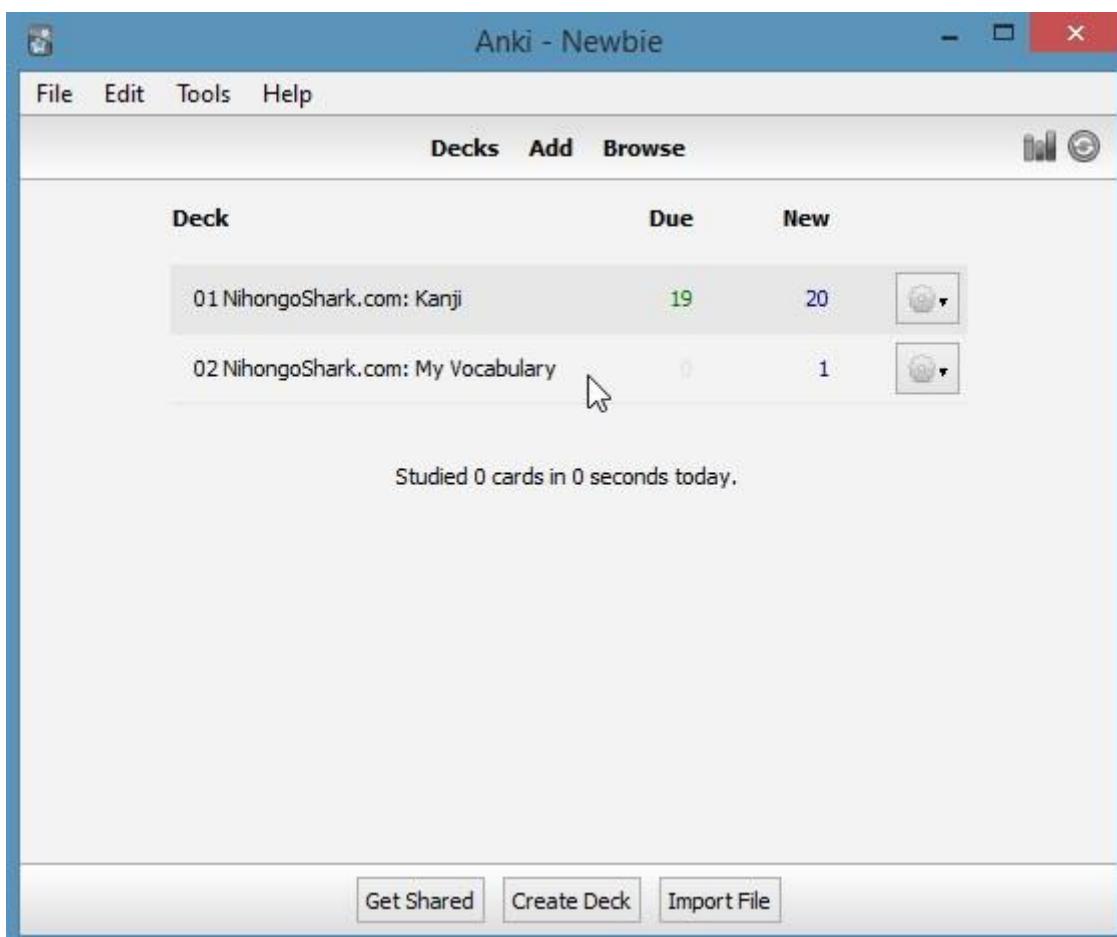
It should take about half a second to download, because it's quite a small file. Then all we need to do is open the Anki file:



Anki should say that it has imported 1 card:



That means that we've got our new deck:

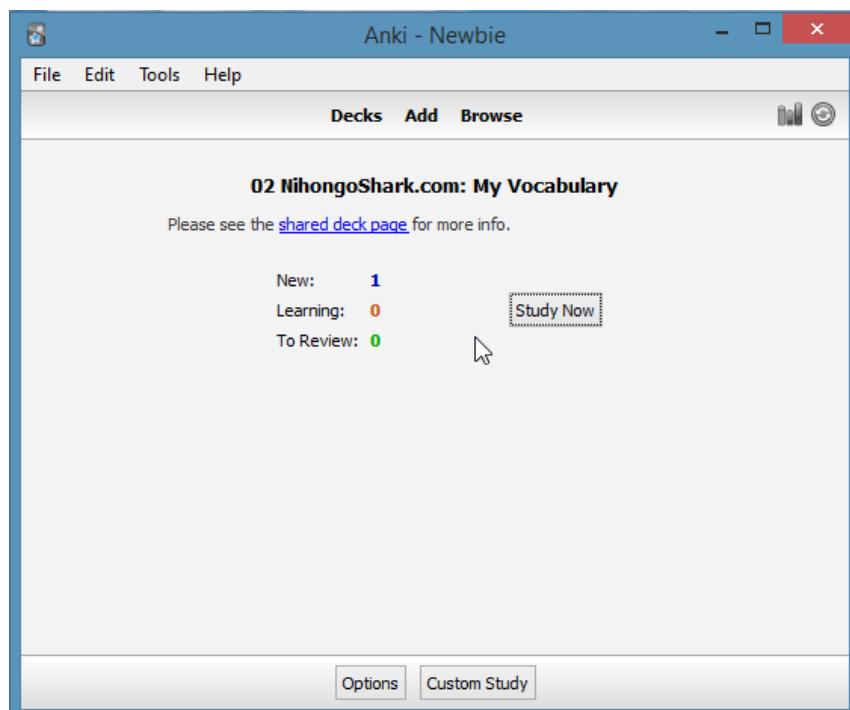


Yay!

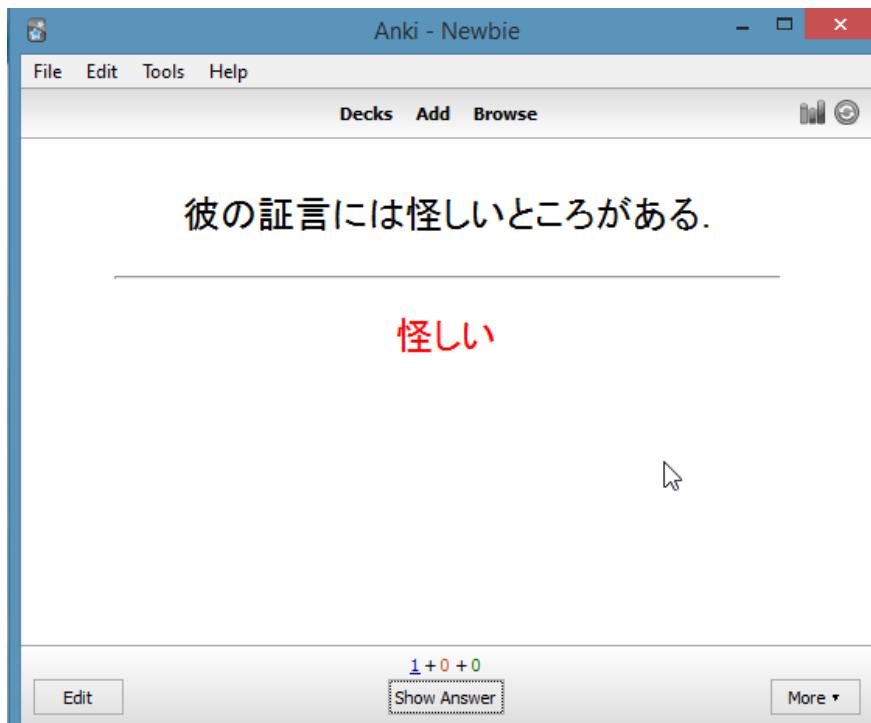
Before we start adding a ton of vocab to this beast, let's take a look at the layout.

#### *Personal Vocabulary Deck Layout*

From the deck's main page, let's click "Study Now:"



This will show us the sample card that I've included in this deck. Here is the front:

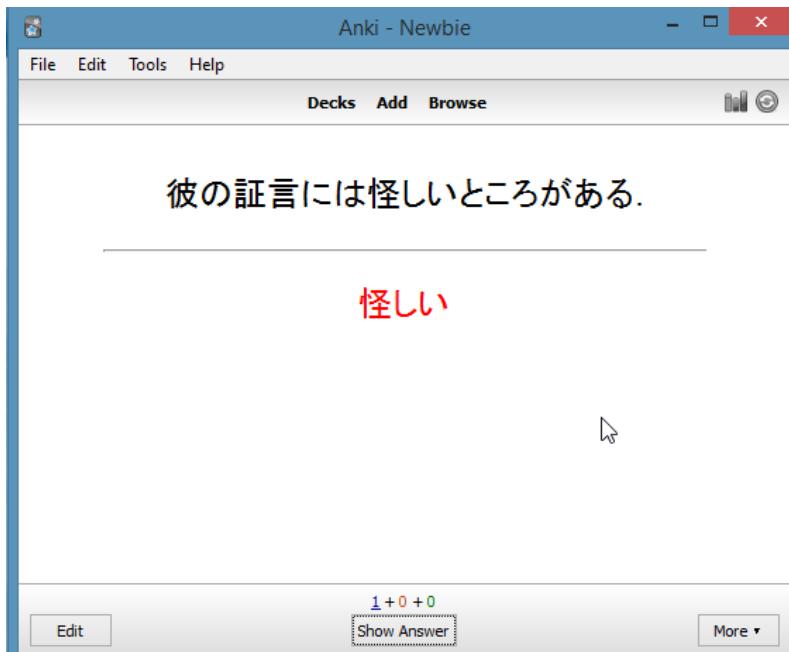


Agh! Scary Japanese characters everywhere! Let's click show answer:



There's quite a lot going on here. Let's take another look at this card, but this time I'll explain the many factors that went into deciding its layout.

Let's start with the front side:



We have the target word we want to learn at the bottom, in red, and then we have an

example sentence that includes this word in black above it.

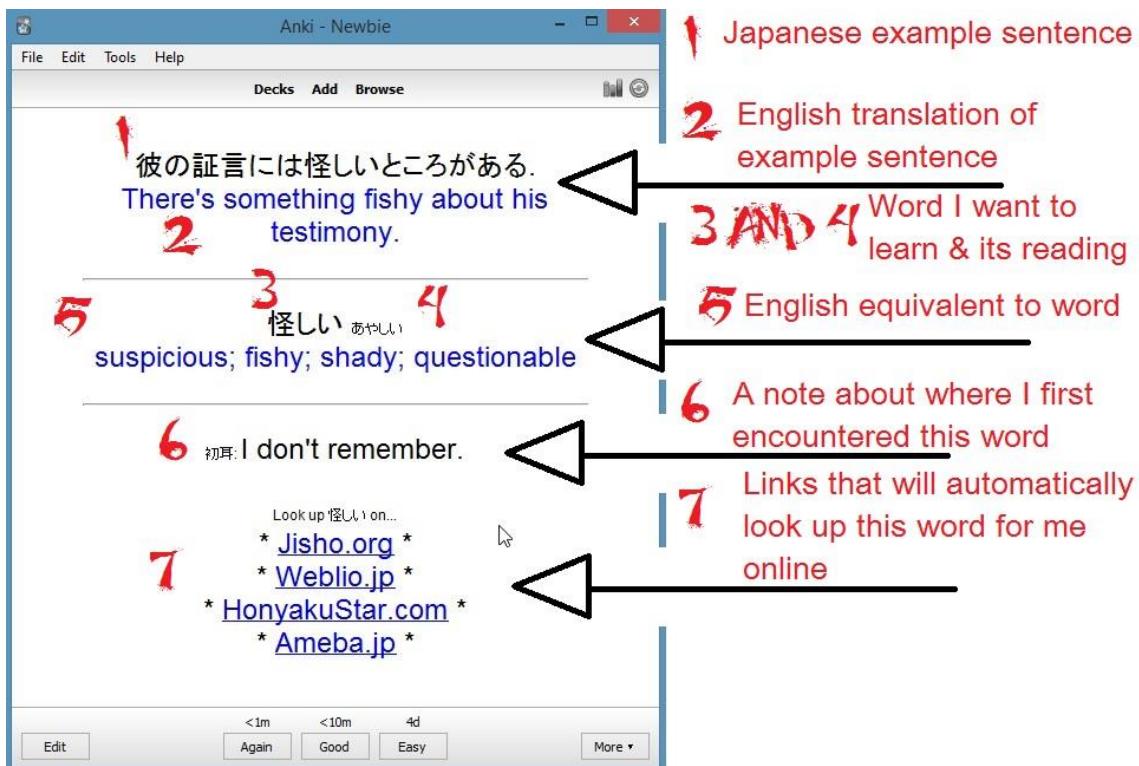
**Why do we need an example sentence?** Some people make flashcard decks that only focus on one word at a time, out of context, not in a sentence. I think that this is not entirely horrible. It might even be pretty useful for a European language that has a more similar structure to English. The fact with Japanese, however, is that you pretty much have no idea how to use words until you see them being used in a sentence that was created by a native speaker. This is especially important in the beginning stages of learning, because you will be more likely to form unnatural sentence constructions. As such, it simply does not make sense for us to be studying new vocabulary out of context.

**Why are there no furigana?** You may or may not know this, but the technology to automatically add the readings above kanji characters does exist. [Here's the link](#) to an Anki plugin that will do it for you. Personally, I don't like reading Japanese text that has furigana. I think that by reading text without it, I am more likely to retain the meaning and reading of the kanji. Then, when I forget the correct meaning of a word, I can just select it, and if I'm using my iOS device, then the definition (and reading) will pop up anyways. If I'm on my computer, I can copy and paste anything into a dictionary to see what the word and reading is. And each time, I will make an effort to remember the correct reading, because I won't be leaning on the furigana crutch. That's just my style, though. Yours might be different, and that's totally cool. After all, that plugin I just linked to has quite a few good reviews.

So, when I look at this card, I'm trying to understand a few things:

1. The meaning of the target word 惊しい.
2. The meaning of the example sentence 惊しい.
3. The proper reading of every kanji that appears in the sentence.
4. The meaning of every word that appears in the sentence.
5. The way in which 惊しい is being used in this sentence.

While studying, I don't explicitly list those off one through five, but that's naturally what I would be contemplating when faced with this card. Then, after a few seconds thinking about it, I click "Show Answer" and take a look at the back side of the card:



When I get to the back side of a card, the first thing I do is check that I had a correct understanding of the sentence in which the target word appears. In other words, I compare 1 & 2. Then I scroll down and check that I had the correct reading (4) in my head for the target word (3), and if necessary I briefly glance at the English equivalents for these words (5).

I don't really pay much attention to the English equivalents, because so often in Japanese things just don't match up, you know? But I've found that it helps me to know what English is usually ascribed to a certain word, especially now that I've started doing translation work. If you look at a site like [JALUP](#), he recommends doing Japanese-Japanese cards instead of Japanese-English cards. I actually used to do this, too. But after a while it seemed counter-productive, because I was aspiring to translate. And, well, I should know the closest English equivalents to things when I want to translate them into English.

はつみみ

For #6, those little Japanese characters are 初耳 / *hatsumimi*. Literally, these two characters mean “first time” + “ear,” but it actually means “hearing something for the

first time.” Japanese people often say this type of phrase when they hear something for the first time, as a kind of reaction:

はつみみ  
それは初耳です.

*sore wa hatsumimi desu.*

[That's news to me. /// That's the first I've heard of it.](#)

I think it's probably even more common to hear someone say **はじめて知った / hajimete shitta**, though. This is pretty much the same thing, only this time it literally means “it's the first time I knew that.” I often get Japanese students who want to say this in English, and they end up saying things like “I knew it for the first time” or “I know that for the first time.” I’m guessing that more natural English would be something like “I didn’t know that.” Or, if you want to really express surprise: “I had no idea.”

～え～！初めて知った！

*heeyy! hajimete shitta!*

[I didn't know that! /// I had no idea!](#)

(Also, that “heeyy!” is just a weird sound Japanese people make when they learn something new or interesting. Watch 3 seconds of Japanese variety television, and you’ll probably hear it 26 times.)

Anyways, getting back on track, the reason that I wrote **初耳** is that this is a place for you to write a note about where you first heard this word. So, the English next to it might say “At Yuko’s party,” or “Yuta said this when he was drunk,” or “in [my favorite manga].” A reminder of the context of when you heard a word can be very useful for remembering it. That said, this field is totally optional. For the example I just wrote: “I don’t remember.”

Lastly, #7 is a list of auto-generated links that will look up the target word for you in your browser. So if you click “Jisho.org,” then it’ll take you to this page:

Denshi Jisho — Online Japanese dictionary

Home [Words](#) [Kanji](#) [Kanji by radicals](#) [Sentences](#) [About](#) [Forum](#) [Links](#)

Japanese:  English:  Dictionary: [General dictionary \(Edict\)](#) ▾

Common words only:  Kana as romaji:

[Search](#) [Reset](#)

Found 2 words.

怪しい

あやしい

**1:** suspicious; dubious; doubtful; dodgy; susj financial situation); ominous (e.g. weather);  
**2:** charming; bewitching; mysterious

*Common word, Adjective*

[Sentences](#) [Kanji details](#) [External links](#)

The same goes for the other dictionaries. If you click the link for Ameba, it will take you to search results for that word on the [Ameblo](#) website. This is cool if you want to see if/how Japanese people are using this word in their casual, everyday writing. You'll see a page like this by clicking:

**Ameba 検索**

ブログから探す プロフィールから探す

怪しい

関連キーワード(広告)  
SB証券 アメリカンホーム 東洋証券 ネットローン DMMFX

ブログタイトルの検索結果 207件中 1-2 件を表示

 [あやしたの怪しい日記](#)  
ここにうつりゆくよしなしことをそこはかとなくかきつくろっているので…  
👤 通称などない

 [怪しい隣人【回顧録】](#)  
超級魔王沙都子弾  
👤 noir@匿名希望

[▶ ブログタイトルの検索結果をもっと見る >](#)

ブログ記事の検索結果 82,900件中 1-10 件を表示

[募集【シングル限定】バレンタイン☆コミュニケーション交流会第1回](#)  
…ただくこともあります。・出会いの場の提供であり、その後の取次はいたしません。・身分確認を細かくはしておりません。各参加者で見極めてお付き合いをお願いいたします。・何か怪しい方等ございましたら、ご連絡ください。警告並びに退… [2015年02月06日] 

 【広島】楽しく自分を好きになるダイエット&幸せ感度U…

[キッシンググラミイが真鍋吉明](#)  
…的をハッキリさせておくという心構えも必要であろうと覚えておきましょう。サプリメント自体の構成要素すべてが表示さ

Those top two are blogs with **怪しい** in the title, and the results after that are blog entries that have the word **怪しい** in them. You may notice that this word appears in 82,900 entries! That's always a good sign that people are actually using this word in everyday life. If you get a result that says there are 58 entries, then you might want to second guess even trying to memorize your target word, as apparently nobody's using it.

### *Adding Words to Your Personal Vocabulary Deck*

Some of you might be looking at that last example sentence and thinking, what does

**証言** mean?!

## 彼の証言には怪しいところがある。 There's something fishy about his testimony.

Aside from the fact that you can totally guess what this means by either looking at the kanji (which you should already know, because this is Phase #3, and we learned all of the kanji in Phase #2):

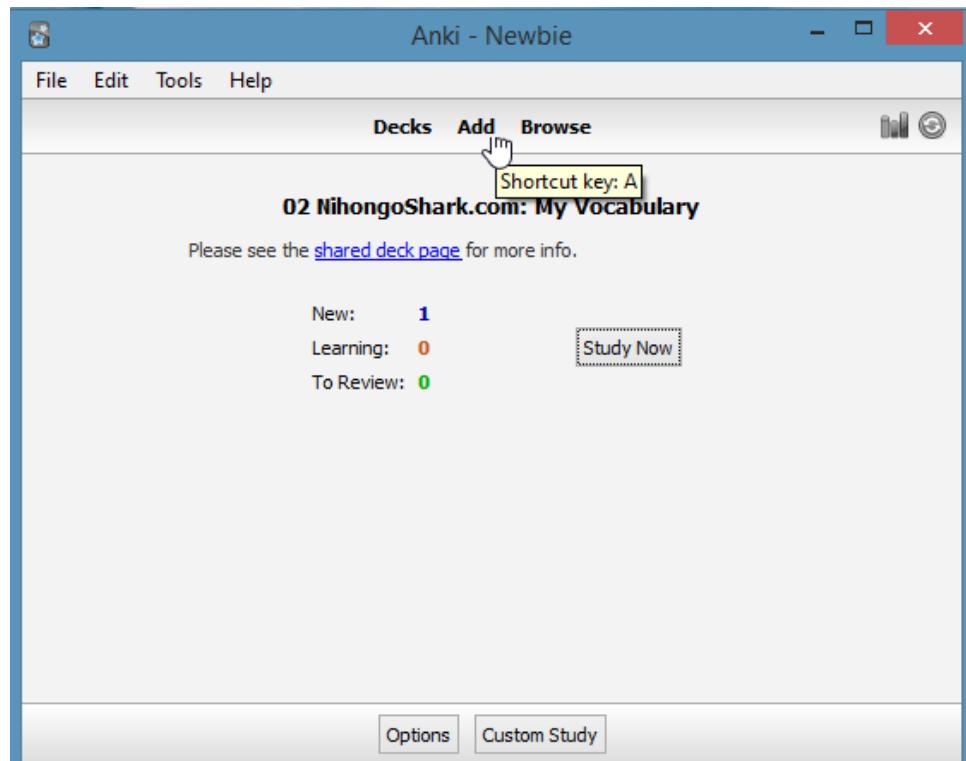
証 “evidence” + 言 “say” = 証言 “testimony”

Or you could even just guess by looking at that word “testimony” in the English translation. Your choice, yo. Freedom.

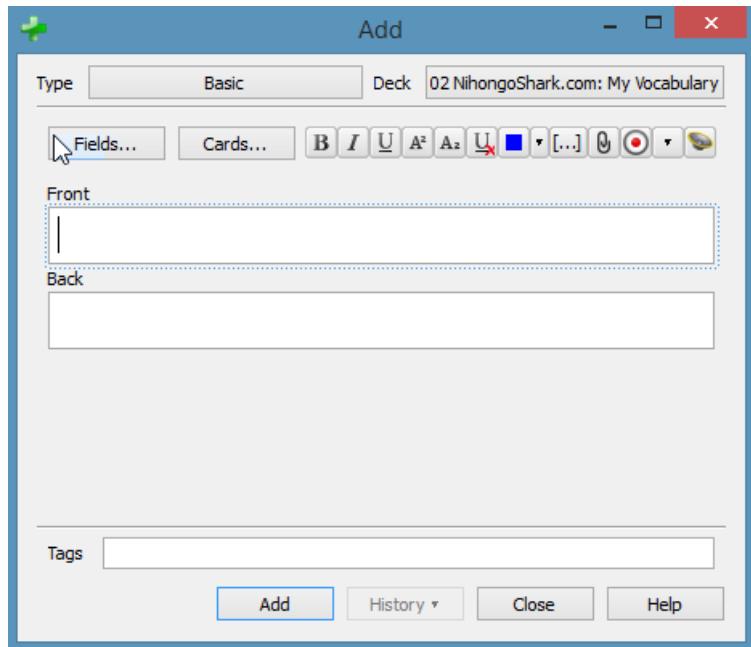
But what if I want to remember this word 証言 forever, forever-ever, forever-ever?? Well, then I'd need to make a new flashcard.

### *Manually Entering a New Flashcard*

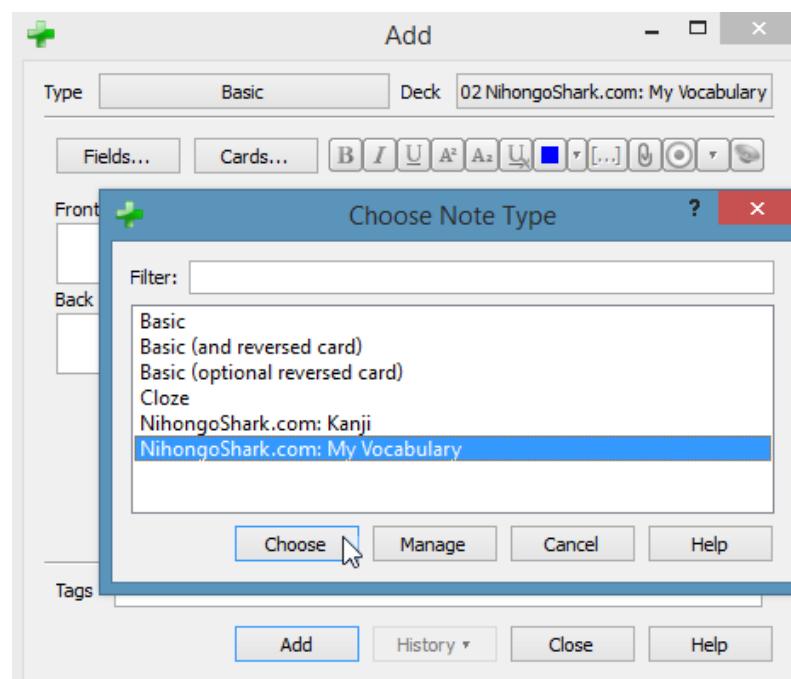
Let's start by going to My Vocabulary deck's page and clicking add:



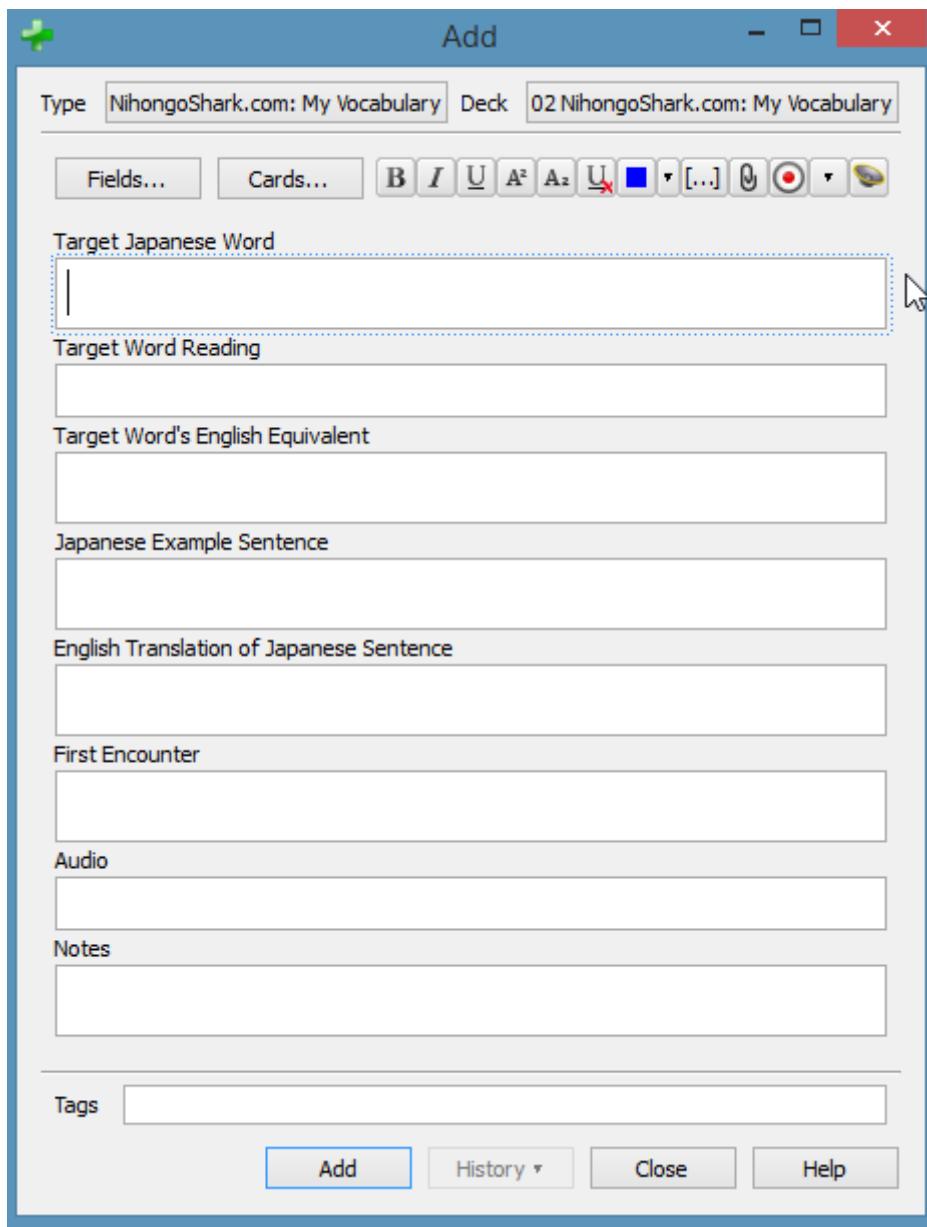
This will bring up fields to enter a new word:



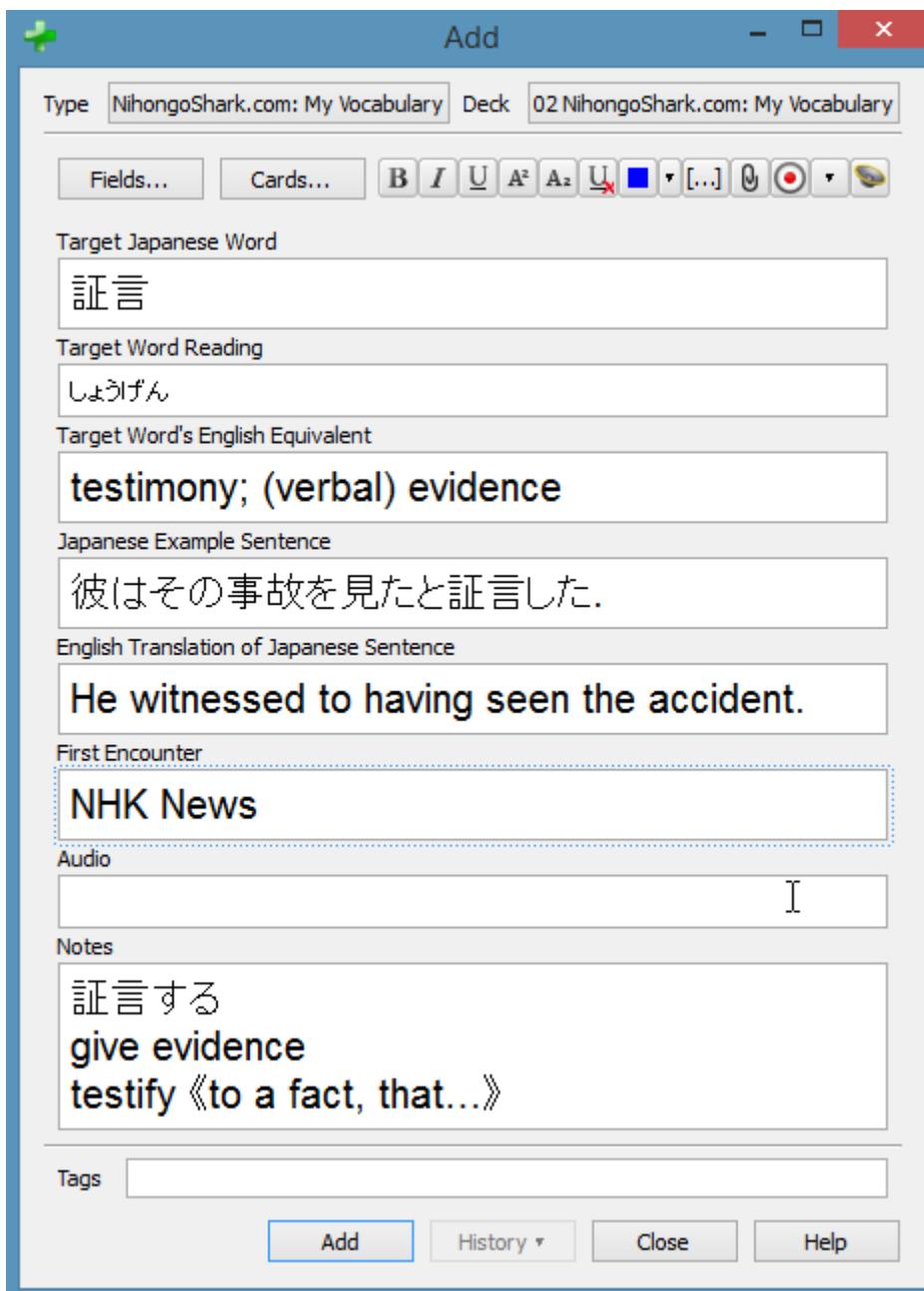
But wait! This isn't the card layout that I want, so I click where it says "Basic," then in the popup I select the card layout I want and click "Choose:"



Sweet! This is exactly the layout I wanted:



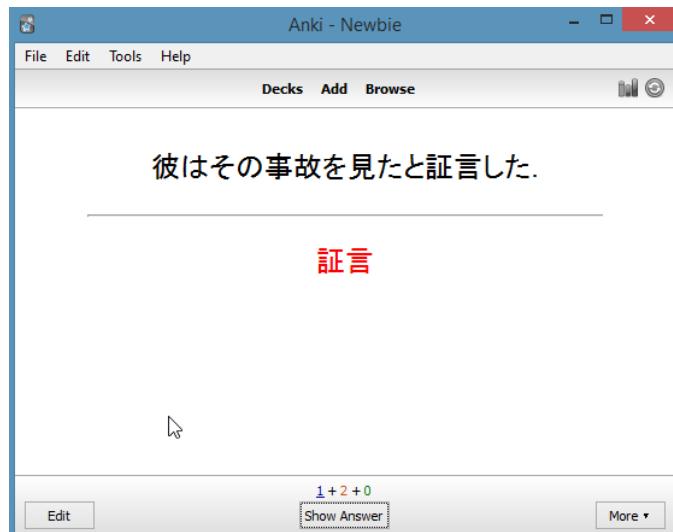
Now, using the plethora of awesome resources that I listed in Phase #1, I can make a card for this. Using the [Weblio entry](#) for this word, and the [Weblio example sentences](#) for this word, this is what I came up with (i.e. what I copied and pasted):



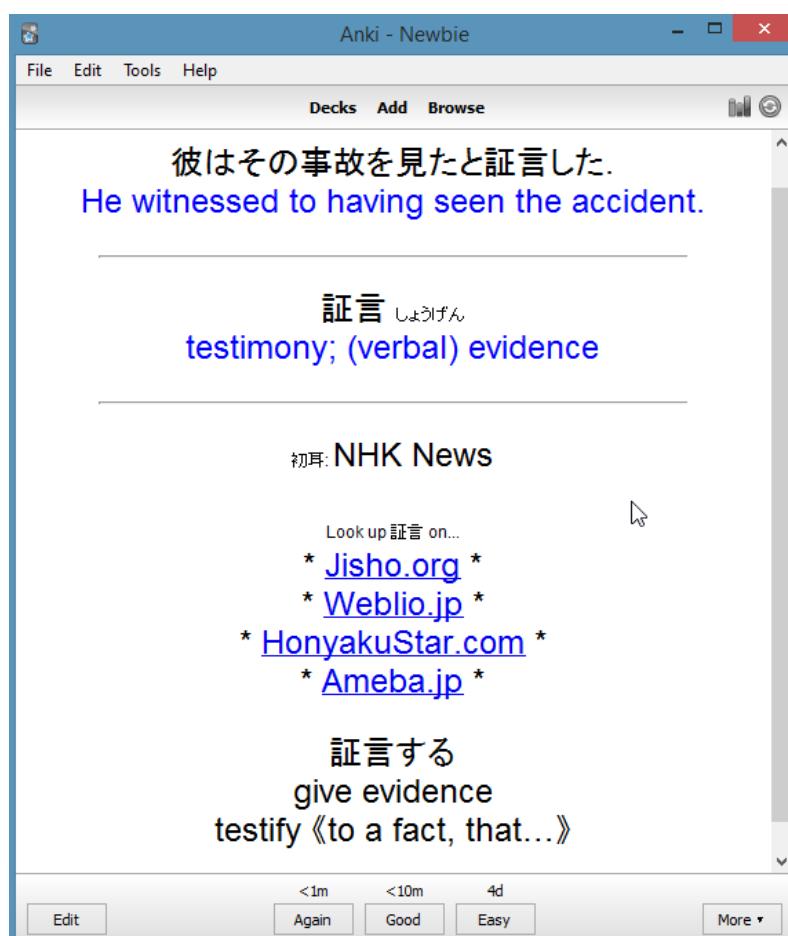
At the bottom there, as a note, I included that adding する / *suru* to 証言 makes it into the verb “to testify” or “to give evidence.” Usually, I wouldn’t include something like this, because I’ve gotten used to this way that Japanese likes to make nouns into verbs using する. But if I were still a beginner, or if I thought it was a cool bit of information, then this is where I could paste it.

When I’m finished, I click “Add.” So now the next time I’m studying new words, I’ll

come across this baby:



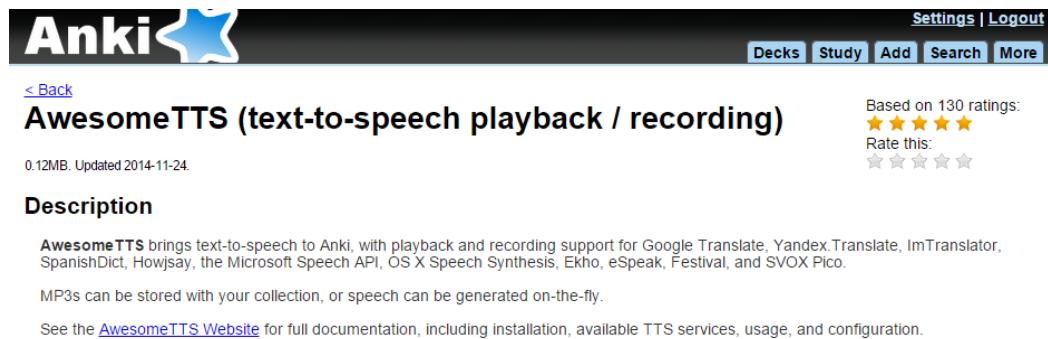
And when I do, I'll freak out that I've forgotten what this word meant. Then I'll click "Show Answer" and vaguely recall creating this flashcard, perhaps:



Yay for learning!

## Adding Audio to Flashcards

If I want to get real fancy, then I can even add audio to this card using this sweet Anki plugin: [AwesomeTTS \(text-to-speech playback / recording\)](#). That link will take you to this page, where you can scroll through the long list of 5-star reviews for this Anki plugin:



**AwesomeTTS (text-to-speech playback / recording)**

Based on 130 ratings:  Rate this: 

0.12MB. Updated 2014-11-24.

**Description**

AwesomeTTS brings text-to-speech to Anki, with playback and recording support for Google Translate, Yandex.Translate, ImTranslator, SpanishDict, Howjsay, the Microsoft Speech API, OS X Speech Synthesis, Ekhō, eSpeak, Festival, and SVOX Pico.

MP3s can be stored with your collection, or speech can be generated on-the-fly.

See the [AwesomeTTS Website](#) for full documentation, including installation, available TTS services, usage, and configuration.

Scrolling down to the bottom, the page tells us how to add this plugin to our Anki program:

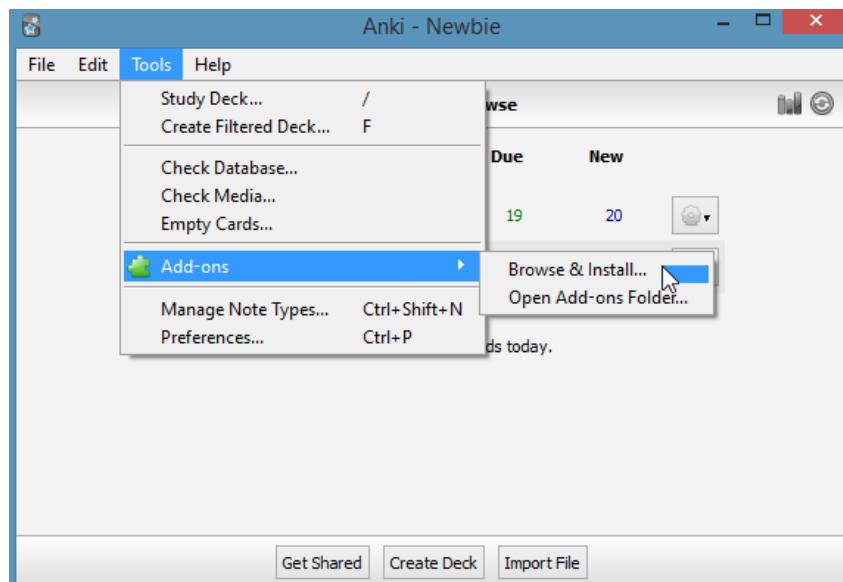
### Download

As add-ons are programs downloaded from the internet, they are potentially malicious. You should only download add-ons you trust. To download this add-on, please copy and paste the following code into the desktop program:

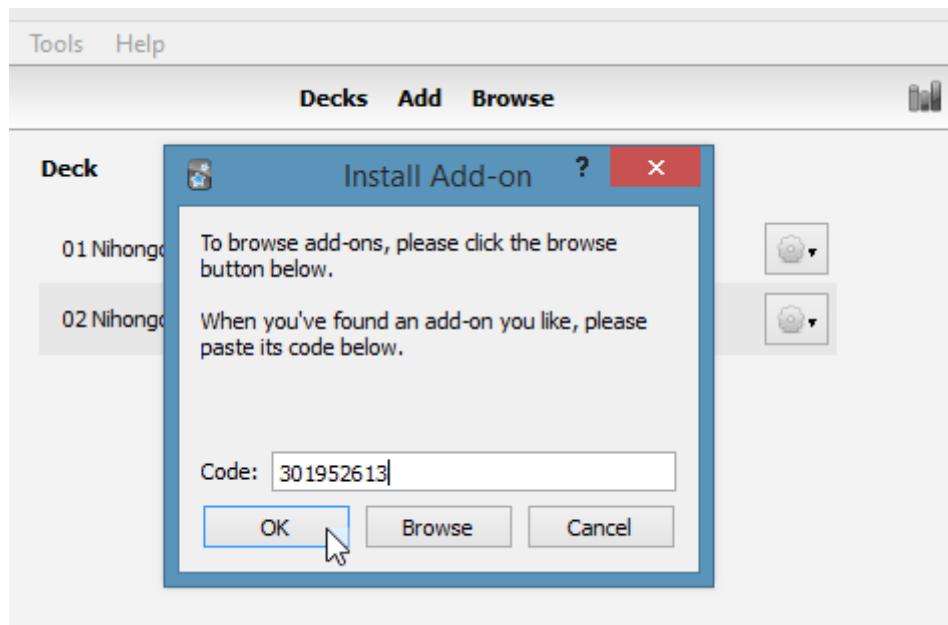
301952613



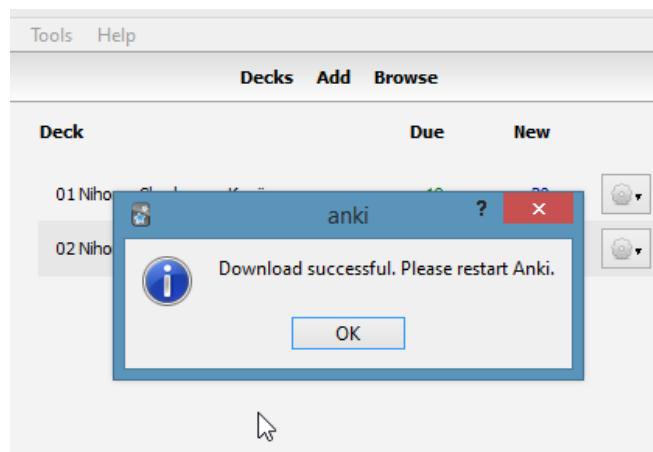
To install this add-on, I go to Tool → Add-Ons → Browse & Install:



Now I just paste the add-on code that I saw on the [AwesomeTTS](#) page:



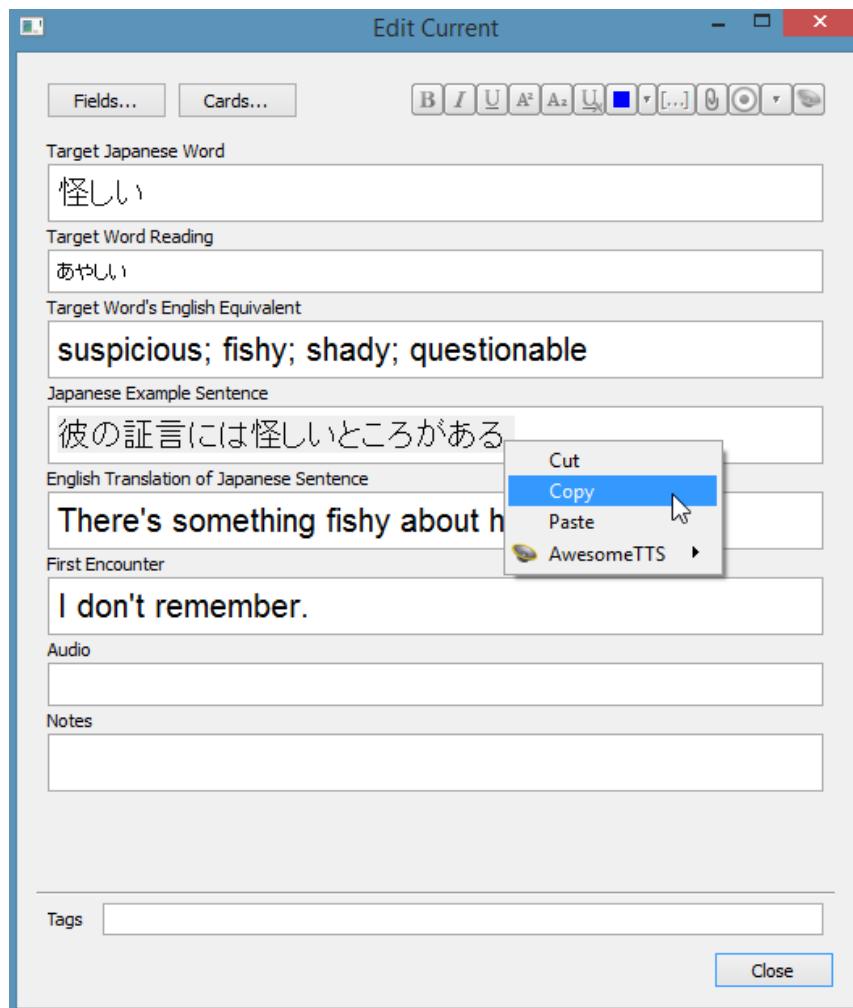
Success:



So now let's try adding some audio to my Anki cards. First, I restart Anki, then I start studying so I can see one of the cards that I've already made:



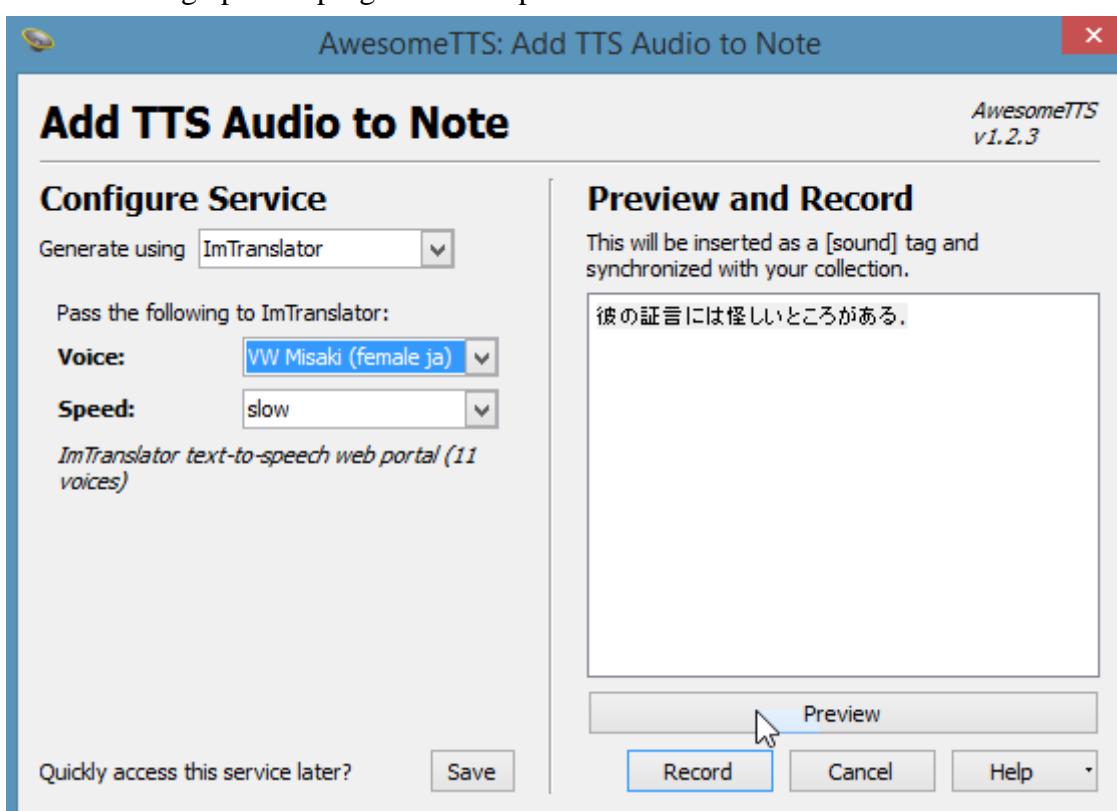
This guy again?! Let's click "Edit" down at the bottom left of the page. That'll bring us here:



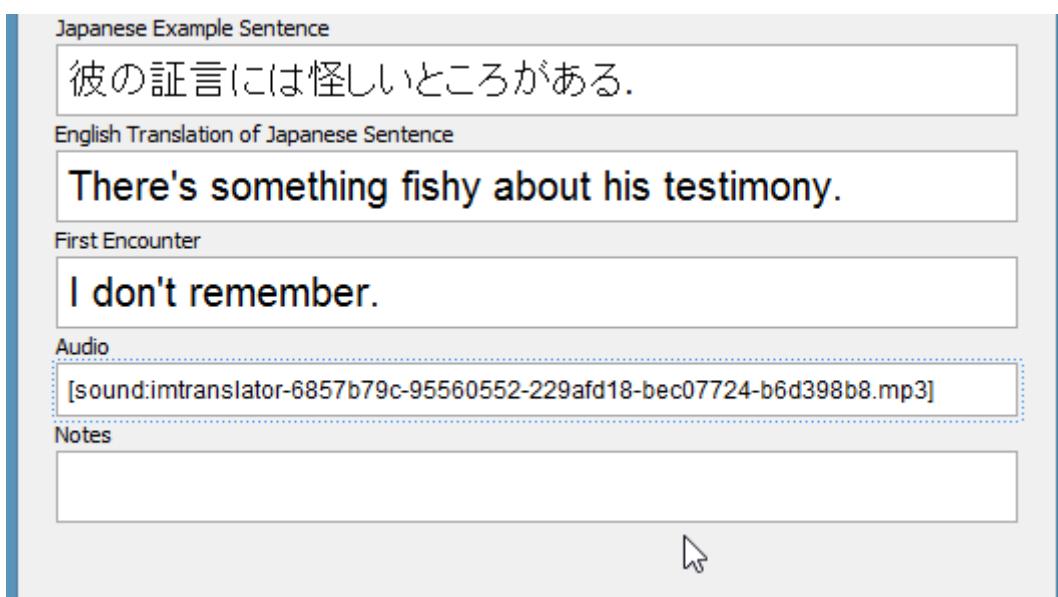
When I select the sentence that I want audio for, there is an awesome way to generate an mp3 for this text automatically. But that will put the audio file next to this, and I want it in the Audio field. So instead, I'm going to click copy, then paste it in the Audio field. Then I can generate the mp3 by right clicking and selecting AwesomeTTS:



This will bring up the mp3-generation options:



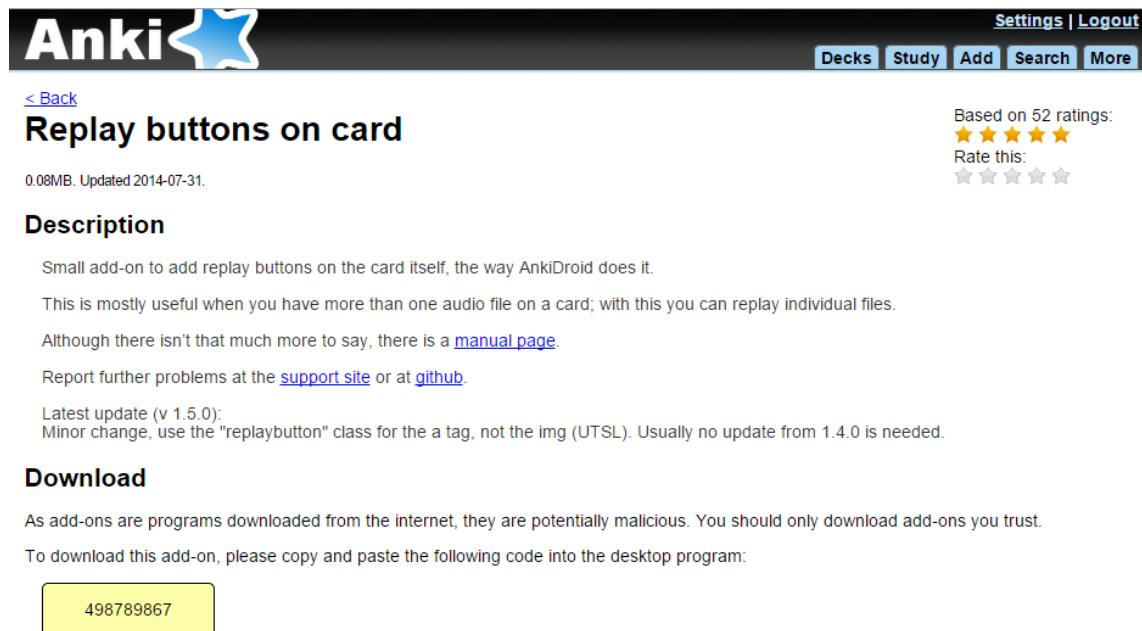
You can select from a number of services to generate the mp3s for your flashcard. Google Translate is probably the most reliable, but the voice that it uses right now is totally hideous and robotic. The Misaki voice from ImTranslator isn't so bad. ImTranslator is also cool, because there is a speed setting. That's what I've selected above. Be sure to click "Preview" once to see that the voice is actually being generated. Then, if everything sounds good to go, click "Record!" This will stick an mp3 into my "Audio" field:



I click "Close." Now when I see this card, the audio track is automatically played:



But what if I want to hear this track over and over again? Luckily, there's a plugin for that, too. This time it's "[Replay buttons on card](#):



The screenshot shows the Anki add-on page for the "Replay buttons on card" plugin. The page includes the Anki logo, navigation links (Decks, Study, Add, Search, More), and a rating section (Based on 52 ratings: 4.5 stars, Rate this: 1 to 5 stars). The main content area contains the add-on's description, which is a small add-on to add replay buttons on the card itself. It also includes links to a manual page, support site, and GitHub, along with update information (v 1.5.0) and a note about minor changes.

**Description**

Small add-on to add replay buttons on the card itself, the way AnkiDroid does it.

This is mostly useful when you have more than one audio file on a card; with this you can replay individual files.

Although there isn't that much more to say, there is a [manual page](#).

Report further problems at the [support site](#) or at [github](#).

Latest update (v 1.5.0):  
Minor change, use the "replaybutton" class for the a tag, not the img (UTSL). Usually no update from 1.4.0 is needed.

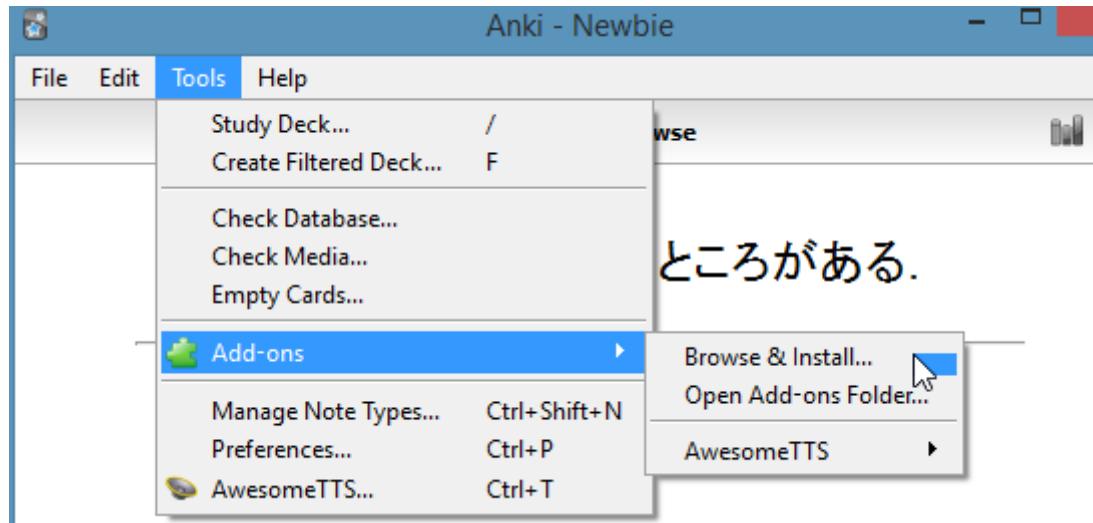
**Download**

As add-ons are programs downloaded from the internet, they are potentially malicious. You should only download add-ons you trust.

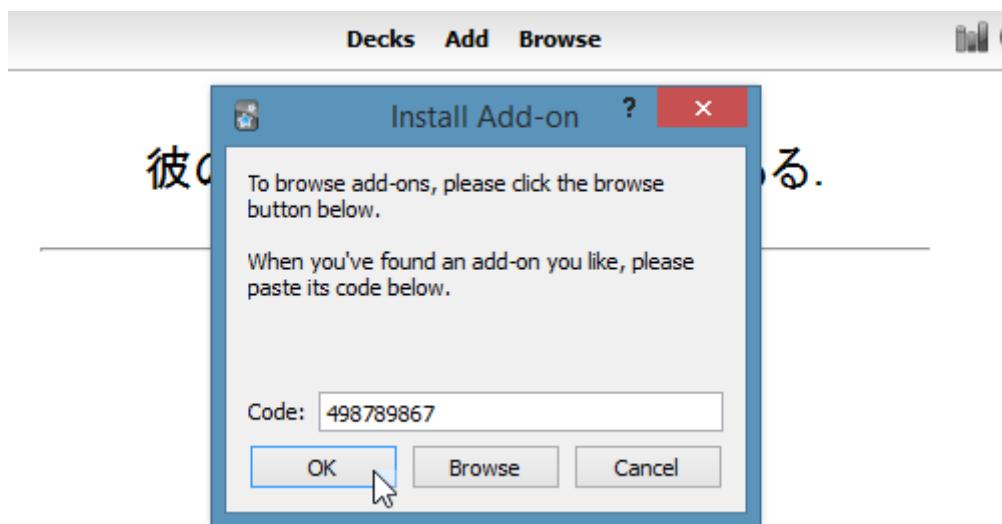
To download this add-on, please copy and paste the following code into the desktop program:

```
498789867
```

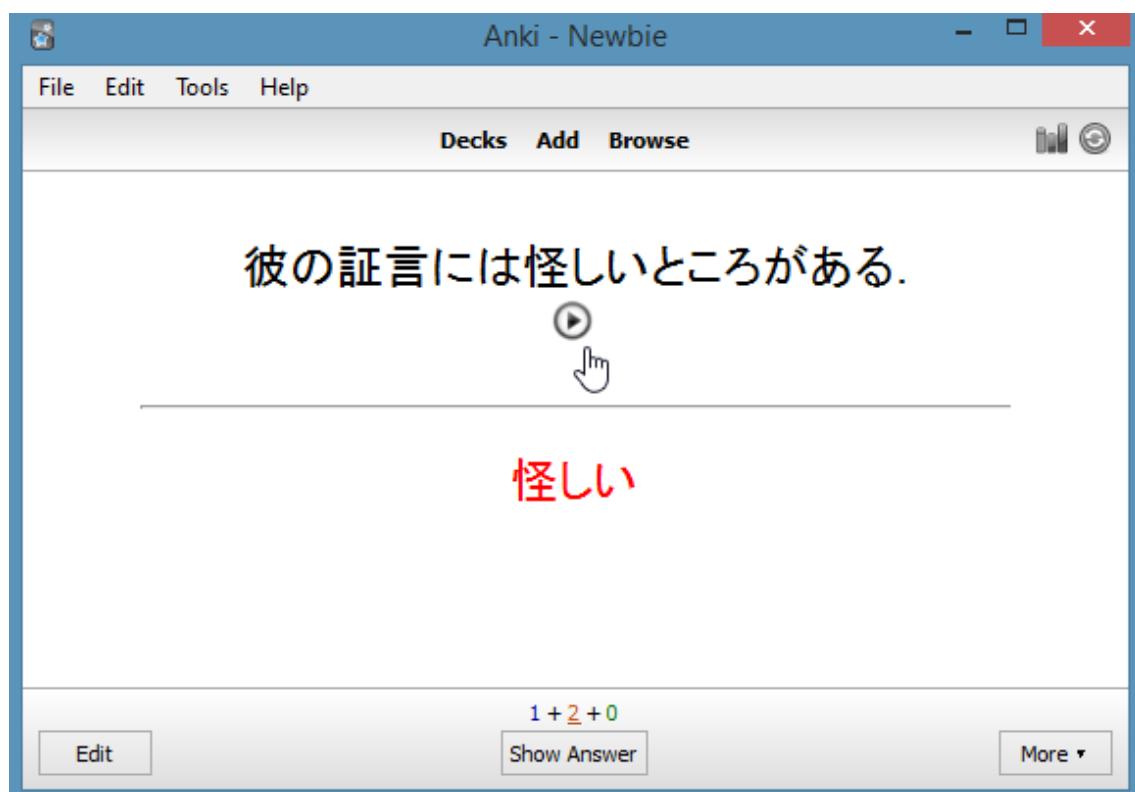
Let's go ahead and install that using the same process as before. Tools → Add-Ons → Browse & Install:



Now we paste the code and click "OK:"



Then we restart Anki. And now when we come across cards with audio, they'll have a cute little play button next on them:



So awesome, yeah? The one major downside to this is that the computer often reads kanji incorrectly. So you can't really trust that the audio matches the correct pronunciation of the words. I think that these mistakes are really easy to spot. But then, I'm not a beginner

now, and it might be quite confusing for someone just getting started. Eventually you'll learn the correct pronunciation for everything anyways, though, so I wouldn't worry about it too much.

Also, later I'm going to show you how to generate audio for tons of cards all at once (it's really easy).

### *Flashcard Branching*

---

So in the examples above, we started with this sentence:

かれ しょうげん あや  
彼の証言には怪しいところがある。

**There's something fishy about his testimony.**

Our goal was to learn the word **怪しい**, but since it had a different word that we didn't know, **証言**, we ended up making a card with this sentence also:

かれ じこ み しょうげん  
彼はその事故を見たと証言した。

**He witnessed to having seen the accident.**

This process is called branching, and it can be a really useful method for expanding your vocabulary. Depending on the example sentences that you choose, this process could go on for an infinity, so it's particularly nice as a way to spend free time when you feel like studying. For example, when I made the above flashcard, maybe I don't know

the word for **事故** / *jiko*, "accident," so then I could make a card for this sentence:

じこ ふちゅうい お  
**事故**は不注意から起ころ。

**Accidents arise from carelessness.**

Then, when I learn this word, maybe I don't know the word **不注意** / *fuchuui*, which means "carelessness," so then I might make this card:

あんなに **不注意** だったことを後悔している。  
ふちゅうい こうかい

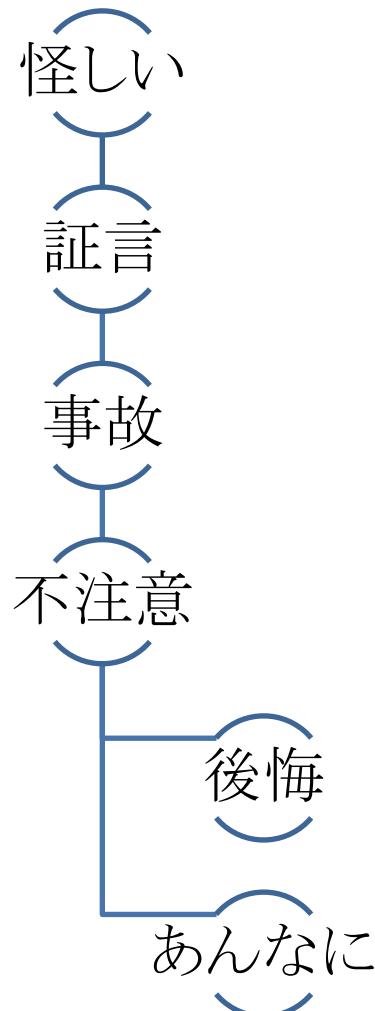
I regret having been so careless.

And then after that I might make a flashcard for **後悔する** / *koukai suru*, “to regret,” or I might make one for **あんなに** / *annani*, “so; to such a degree,” or I might be late for work and just stop my studies there for the day.

Flashcard branching is extremely helpful, because at the very least, you’re putting a word that you want to learn in two separate cards, which means that you get more exposure to target words.

This will sound nerdy, but there are few things I love more in life than blasting music on my headphones while I do Japanese flashcard branching. I’ve probably spent hundreds of hours doing it. So some of you out there might find that it’s pretty fun, too. If you’re at all interested in flashcard branching, I recommend checking out [JapaneseLevelUp.com](http://JapaneseLevelUp.com), because the site goes into great detail on the branching process. His process actually incorporates Japanese-only definitions, then branching for words you don’t know in the definitions also. I agree that this is super effective,

but I wonder if it’s a bit too **理想的** / *risouteki* / “idealistic.” Some of us simply don’t have the time (or interest) to spend that many hours building Anki decks. Last time I checked, they sold pre-made decks on that site to accommodate for these people. Anyways, that system is a bit different than mine, but it might help to look at a couple of different systems and then decide what works best for you.



I'm guessing that some of you are also thinking, nobody has time for all of this! And I know exactly how you feel. Don't panic, because in a minute I'll show you how we can make computers generate flashcards for us.

### *Bookmarking New Words in imi wa?*

---

The flashcard branching process is cool for learning words that we encounter while we're sitting at our computers, but most of the Japanese words we encounter will be out in the real world, and we won't exactly have time to pause for five minutes while we bust out our laptops to make flashcards, will we?

In such a case, I have found that what helps a lot for me is to simply bookmark the words that I look up on [imi wa?](#), the Japanese-English dictionary app that I talked about in Phase #1.

For example, let's say I'm talking to a Japanese person, and I hear them say the word

ちんふんかんふん / *chinpun kanpun* (which just so happens to be one of my

favorite words in Japanese. ちんふんかんふん?! What does that mean?! I

think. So I look it up in imi wa?, and this is what I find:

↓ That's word I'm looking for!



↓ So I go ahead and tap on it.



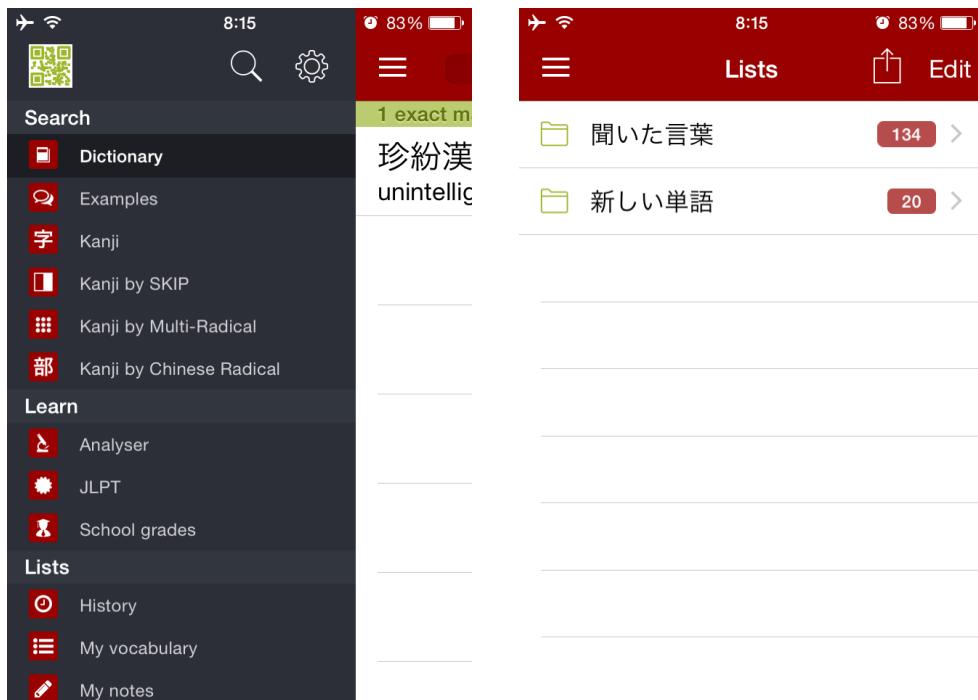
Sweet example sentences. ↓



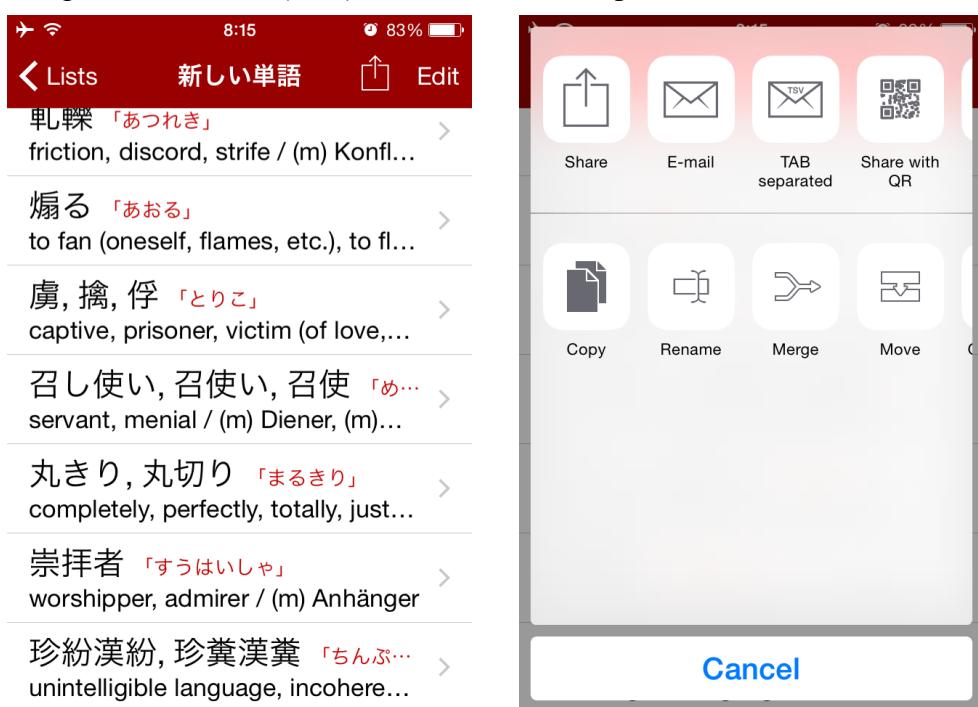
So let's add it to my vocab list. ↓



↓ I can use the toolbar on the left to access “My vocabulary lists.”  
 I have two lists: 聞いた言葉 (words I heard) and 新しい言葉 (new words) ↓



If I scroll to the bottom of the 新しい言葉 list, which I just added ちんぶんかんぶん to, I will find the bookmarked word (and it's ridiculous kanji that no one cares about). Then I can hit the icon next to “Edit” to email this list to myself. I'm going to send it as a “TAB separated” file. (Icon) ↓ (TAB separated file) ↓



Bombs away, homie ↓



件名: [imiwa?] «新しい単語» export

Sent from [imiwa?](#) on iPhone. [Get it for free](#) from AppStore now!

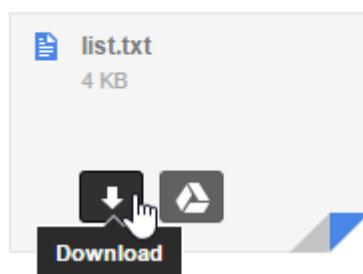


list.txt

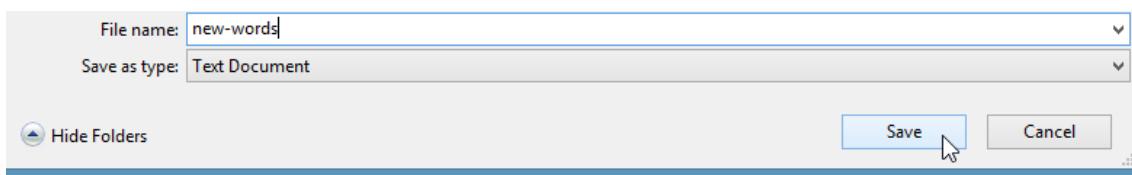
Using vocabulary lists on [imi wa?](#) this way is so awesome, because I can simply hit a little star next to every word I ever look up, and I know that later I'll (automatically) make a flashcard for it, which means that I'll never forget it again, which means that every word I ever look up (i.e. every word I don't understand, pretty much) is a word that I end up memorizing. At first, this means practically every word I encounter. Later in my studies, though, it's not nearly as common, and you really start to feel just how far you've come on this journey.

Anyways, after I send my vocabulary list to myself as a TAB separated CSV file, I can go and find this guy sitting in my inbox, which I go ahead and download:

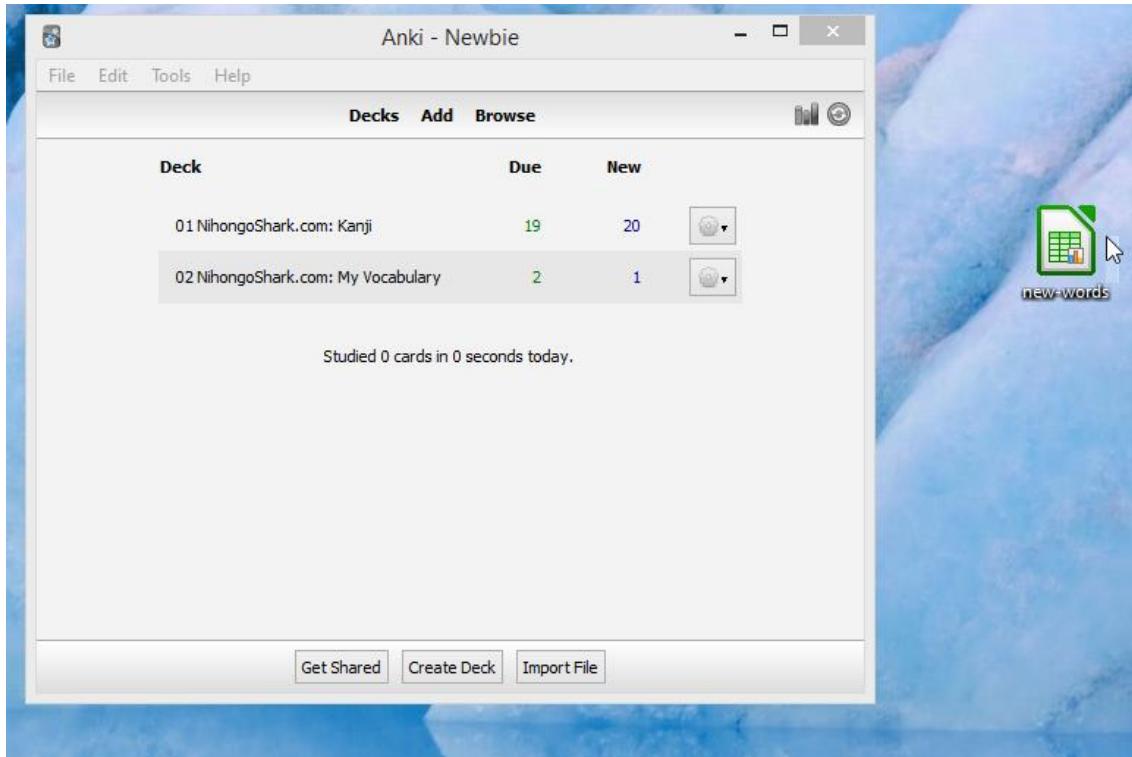
Sent from [imiwa?](#) on iPhone. [Get it for free](#) from AppStore now!



I save it to my desktop (or wherever):

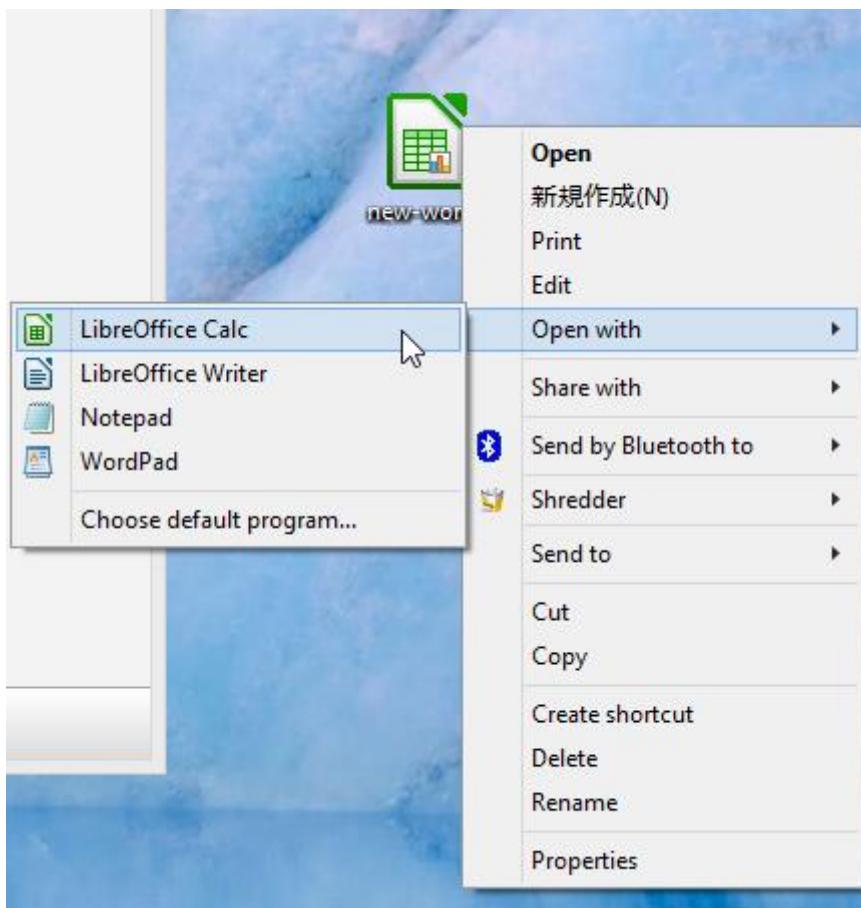


So now this guy is sitting on my desktop:



You could open this file with Excel, but instead I recommend downloading [LibreOffice](#), which will make importing flashcards to Anki much easier. Also, it's totally free.

So after downloading the LibreOffice Suite, I can open this file with LibreOfficeCalc:



The file will look like this:

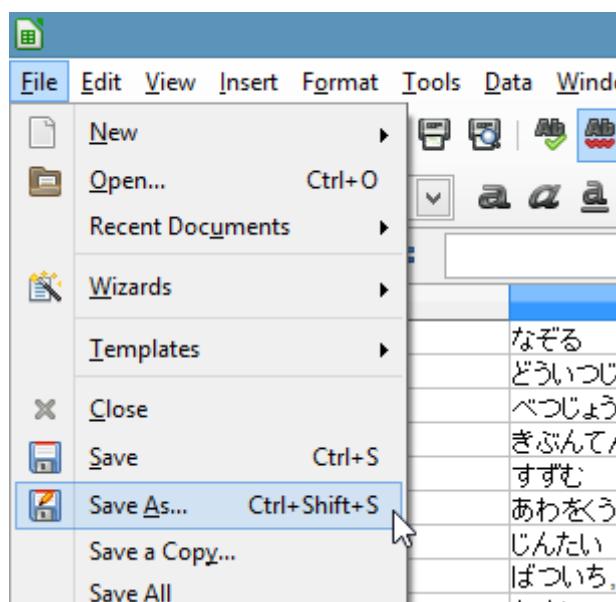
new-words.txt - LibreOffice Calc								
	A	B	C					
1	JMDICT	1922890	揃る	なぞる to trace (drawing), to follow				
2	JMDICT	1687690	同一人物	どういつじんぶつ the very same person / <i> dieselbe </i> (i) Person				
3	JMDICT	1509910	別状 別条	べつじょう something unusual, something wrong, mishap, accident, serious condition (e.g. after an injury), different situation / <i> anderer </i> (m) Zustand, außerg change of pace, change of mood, (mental) break (e.g. going for a walk), refreshment / (i) <i> Abwechslung </i> , (i) <i> Verbesserung </i> der Laune				
4	JMDICT	1222810	気分転換	きふんてんかん to cool oneself, to cool off, to enjoy evening cool / <i> aller dans un endroit frais, prendre le frais, se rafraîchir / </i> sich an der kalten Luft erfrischen, die to be flurried, to be confused, to lose one's head / <i> perdre la tête / verirnt sein, den Kopf verlieren / </i> perder los papeles, dejarse llevar por la precip ligament / (n) <i> Ligamentum </i> , (n) Band				
5	JMDICT	1543880	涼む	すずむ to be flurried, to be confused, to lose one's head / <i> perdre la tête / verirnt sein, den Kopf verlieren / </i> perder los papeles, dejarse llevar por la precip ligament / (n) <i> Ligamentum </i> , (n) Band				
6	JMDICT	1517520	泡を食う	あわをう to be flurried, to be confused, to lose one's head / <i> perdre la tête / verirnt sein, den Kopf verlieren / </i> perder los papeles, dejarse llevar por la precip ligament / (n) <i> Ligamentum </i> , (n) Band				
7	JMDICT	1574180	じん帯 初帯 韶帯	じんたい to be flurried, to be confused, to lose one's head / <i> perdre la tête / verirnt sein, den Kopf verlieren / </i> perder los papeles, dejarse llevar por la precip ligament / (n) <i> Ligamentum </i> , (n) Band				
8	JMDICT	1010290	罰一 はつ一 パツ一	はついち パツいち パツイチ to be once divorced, one-time divorcee, one x mark, i.e. one name struck from the <i> koseki </i> cot, bunk				
9	JMDICT	2010190	簡易ペーパード	かんいペーパード to badger (pester) (a person to do) / <i> harceler </i> / <i> jmdn. belästigen </i> , <i> jmdn. um etw. angehen </i> / <i> fastidiar </i> , <i> marear </i> , <i> agobiar </i> to tower above the rest, to be by the best, to be prominent, to be outstanding, to be a cut above / <i> herausragen </i> , <i> hervorragen </i> , <i> ungewöhnliche </i> se inheritance from a parent / <i> héréditaire </i> / (i) <i> Erbschaft </i> von den Eltern, elterliches (n) <i> Erbe </i>				
10	JMDICT	1006490	せがむ	せがむ conflict, complication, troubles, discord / (m) <i> Konflikt </i> , (i) <i> Verwickelung </i> , (i) <i> Schwierigkeit </i> , (i) <i> Streit </i> , (m) <i> Zwist </i> , (i) <i> Fehde </i>				
11	JMDICT	1632050	すば抜ける	すばぬける friction, discord, strife / (m) <i> Konflikt </i> , (i) <i> Reibung </i> , (i) <i> Zwitteracht </i> , (m) <i> Zwist </i> , (m) <i> Unfriede </i> / <i> discord </i> , mala relación personal, desaveni to fan (oneself, flames, etc.), to flap, to be shaken (by wind), to instigate, to stir up, to agitate, to induce, to buy a large amount in order to cause captive, prisoner, victim (of love, etc.), slave (to one's lust, etc.) / (1) (m) <i> Gefangener </i> , (2) (n) <i> Oster </i> , (i) <i> Sklave </i> / (1) <i> cautivo </i> , <i> prisionero </i> , (2) <i> víctima </i> servant, menial / (m) <i> Diener </i> , (m) <i> Bediensteter </i>				
12	JMDICT	1365210	親譲り	あやゆずり completely, perfectly, totally, just as if / (1) <i> vollkommen </i> , <i> völlig </i> , <i> ganz </i> , (2) <i> ganz und gar </i> (nicht), <i> überhaupt </i> (nicht)				
13	JMDICT	1208780	窓縁	かうとう worshipper, admirer / (m) <i> Anhänger </i>				
14	JMDICT	1573460	乱辟	あつれき unintelligible language, incoherent language, talking nonsense, "all Greek to me", double Dutch, (something) incomprehensible, babble, gibberish				
15	JMDICT	1391630	渦る	あわる どりこ				
16	JMDICT	1585420	虜 捕 俘	とりこ 17	JMDICT	1604960	召し使い 召使い	めいしきい 完全ly, perfectly, totally, just as if / (1) <i> vollkommen </i> , <i> völlig </i> , <i> ganz </i> , (2) <i> ganz und gar </i> (nicht), <i> überhaupt </i> (nicht)
18	JMDICT	2009840	九きり 九切り	まるきり worshipper, admirer / (m) <i> Anhänger </i>				
19	JMDICT	1708130	崇拝者	すうはいしゃ unintelligible language, incoherent language, talking nonsense, "all Greek to me", double Dutch, (something) incomprehensible, babble, gibberish				
20	JMDICT	1610360	珍粉漬糸 珍蜜漬糸	あんぶんかんぶん デンブンカンブン nihongoshark.com				

I see that big long list of words and realize that I simply do not have enough time to go making flashcards for all of them. Luckily, I can just auto-generate flashcards instead! The first thing I need to do is clean up this file a bit. I'll start by deleting the first two columns, which mean nothing to me:

B1    1922890

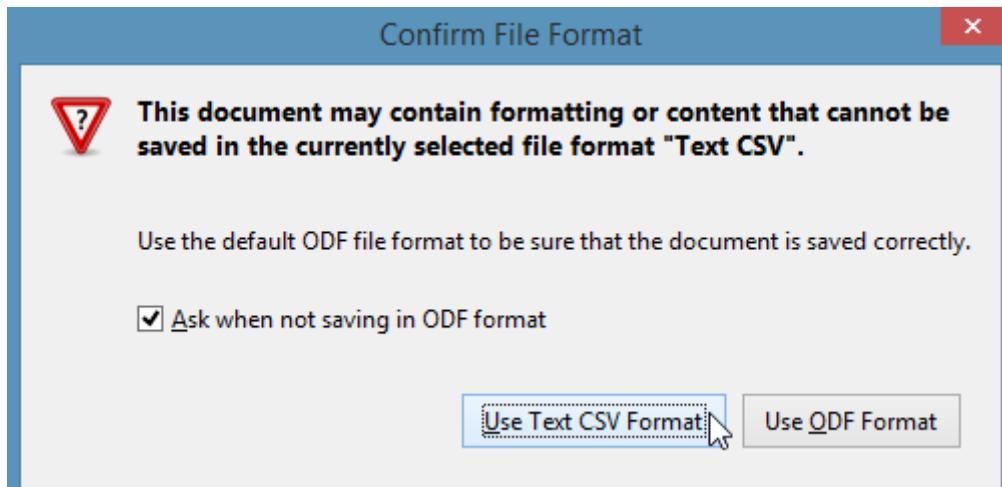
	A	B	C	D
1	JMDICT	19	Format Cells...	ぞる
2	JMDICT	16	Column Width...	ういつじんぶつ
3	JMDICT	15	Optimal Column Width...	つじょう
4	JMDICT	12	Insert Columns Left	ぶんてんかん
5	JMDICT	15	Delete Selected Columns	すむ
6	JMDICT	15	Delete Column Contents...	わをくう
7	JMDICT	15	Hide	んたい
8	JMDICT	10	Show	ついち, バツいち, バツイチ
9	JMDICT	20	Cut	んいベッド
10	JMDICT	10	Copy	ばぬける
11	JMDICT	16	Paste	やゆずり
12	JMDICT	13	Paste Special...	っとう
13	JMDICT	12		つれき
14	JMDICT	15		ある
15	JMDICT	13		りこ
16	JMDICT	15		しつかい
17	JMDICT	16		ふるきり
18	JMDICT	20		すうはいしゃ
19	JMDICT	1708130	崇拜者	ちんぶんかんぶん, チンブンカンブン
20	JMDICT	1610360	珍紛漢紛, 珍董漢董	worst

I also deleted the last column, so now I only have: (1) the word I want to learn, (2) the word's reading, and (3) the English meaning of the word. Sweet! Now I need to Save As...



Be sure to save this as a .csv file:

LibreOffice will be like, use ODF, my favorite! No thank you. We're using Text CSV format:



### *Auto-Generating Cards for Words You've Encountered*

---

Whether you've realized it or not, we've been getting ready to auto-generate cards for these vocabulary words. We just need one more program: EPWing2Anki. Here is the [download page on SourceForge.net](#):



# Epwing2Anki

Used to automate creation of Japanese Anki vocabulary cards.

Brought to you by: [cb4960](#)

[Summary](#) | [Files](#) | [Reviews](#) | [Support](#) | [Wiki](#) | [Code](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Discussion](#)

★ 5.0 Stars (1)

↓ 11 Downloads (This Week)

31 Last Update: 2013-10-27



[Download](#)

Epwing2Anki\_v1.6.2.zip



0



0



0



[Browse All Files](#)



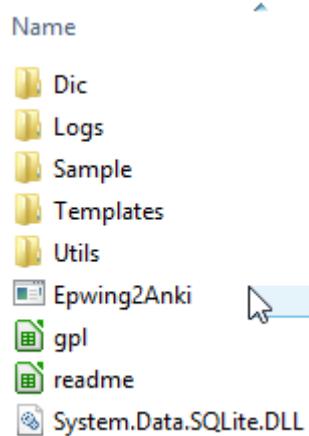
## Description

Epwing2Anki may be used to automatically or semi-automatically create Japanese Anki vocabulary cards based on a provided list of words and one or more of your favorite EPWING dictionaries and/or the included EDICT J-E dictionary and Tatoeba example sentence corpus.

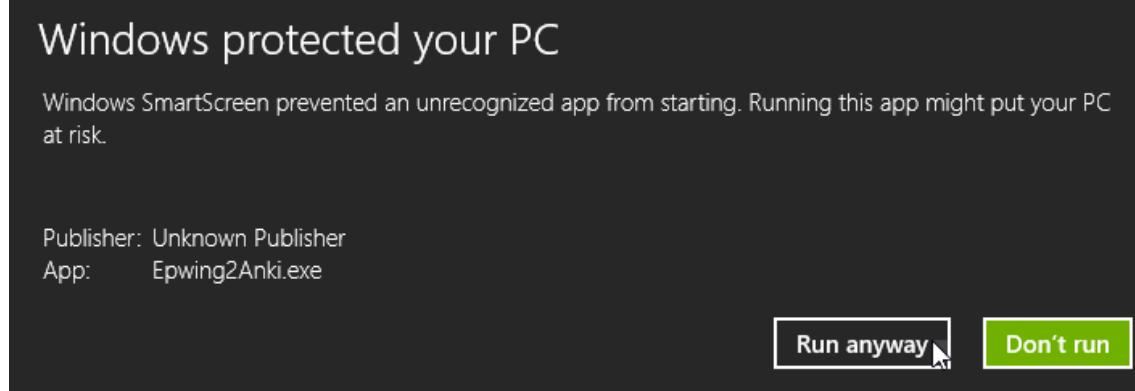
Download and install [EPWing2Anki](#) onto your computer. After extracting the zip file, you'll see this folder:



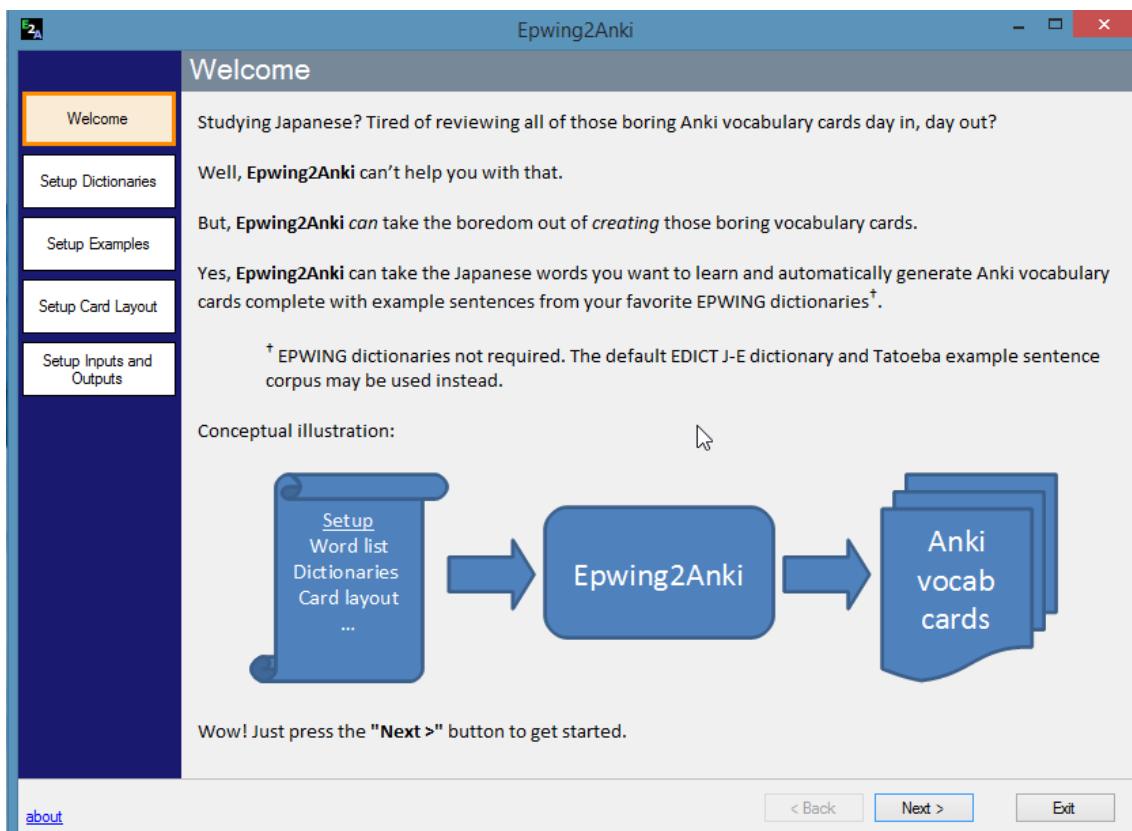
Open it up, then double-click on the application icon:



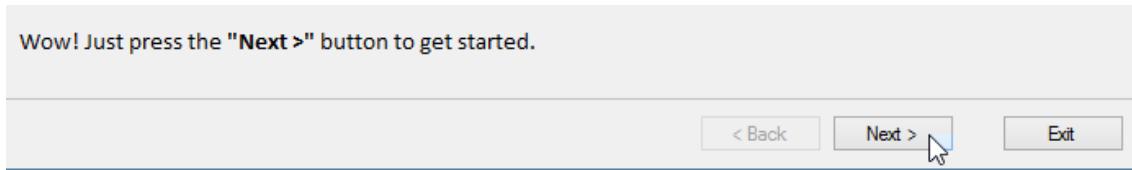
Windows tried to stop me, but I clicked “Run Anyway:”



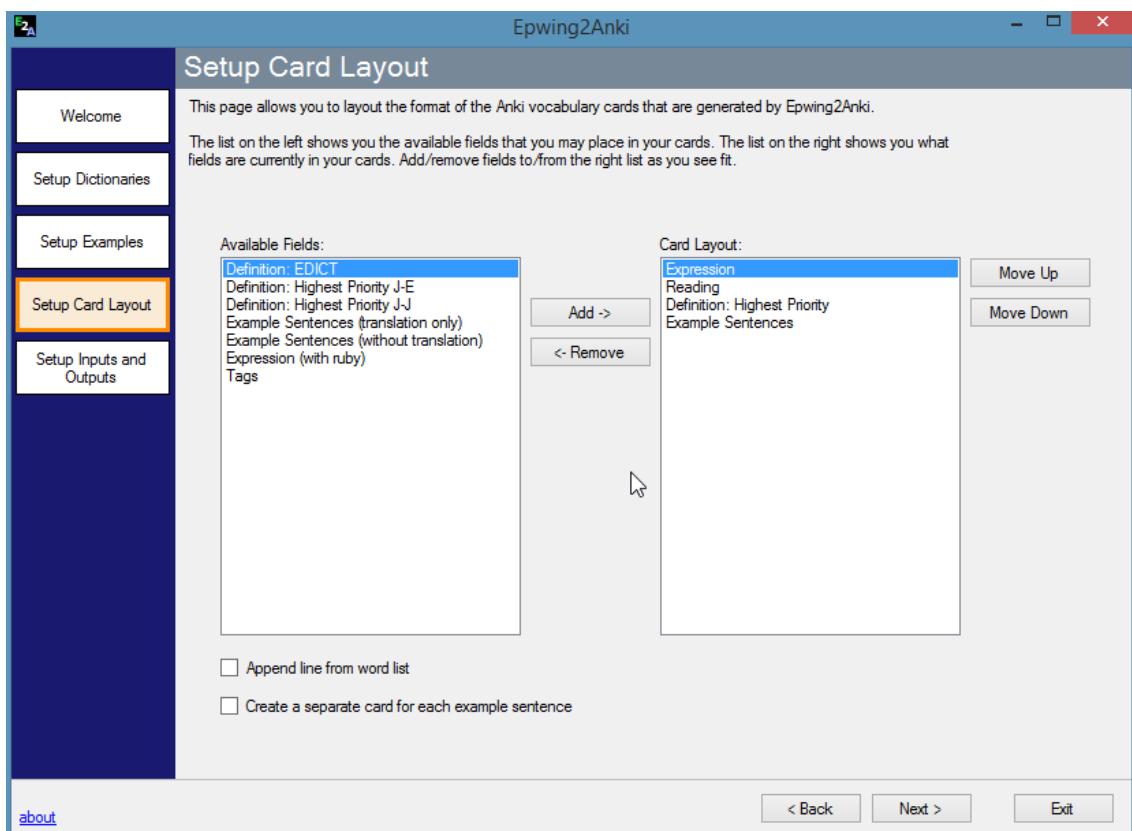
When you open it, this is what you'll see:



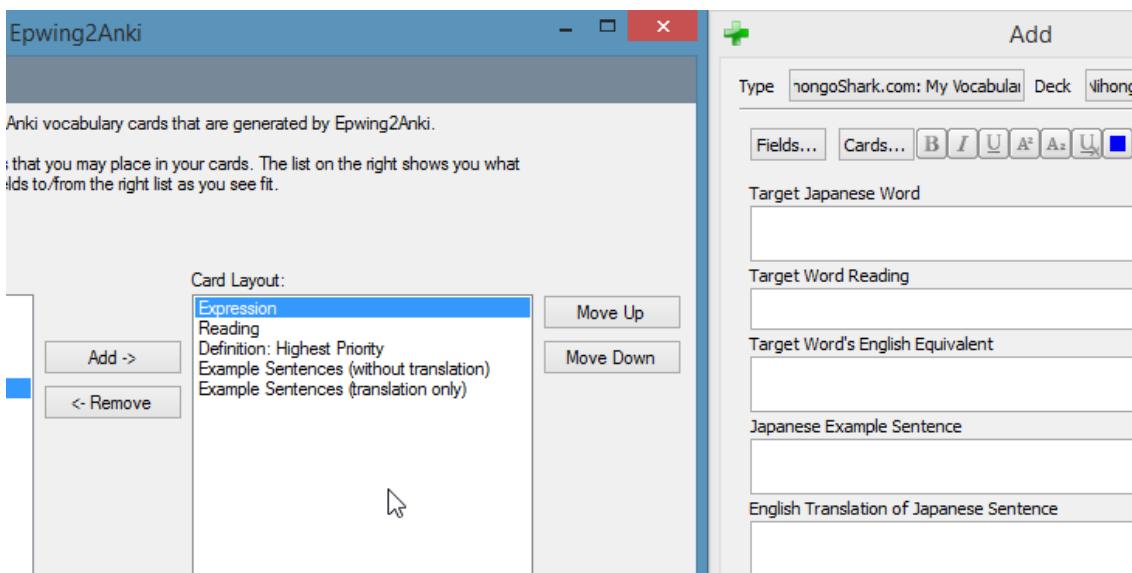
Let's click "Next:"



Unless you have EPWing dictionaries on your PC (which I'm guessing most of you don't), just click "Next" two more times, until you see this page:



To be honest, I always mess this part up. But let's see if I can get it right this time. I want the right side of [EPWing2Anki](#) to match the fields of my vocabulary deck:

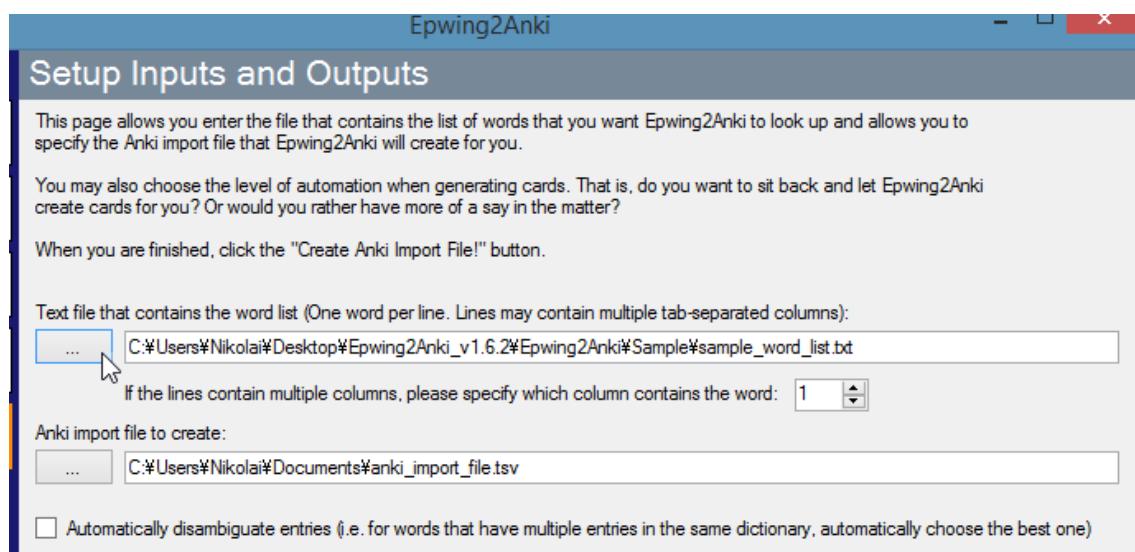


This means that I set the “Card Layout” in the exact order shown:

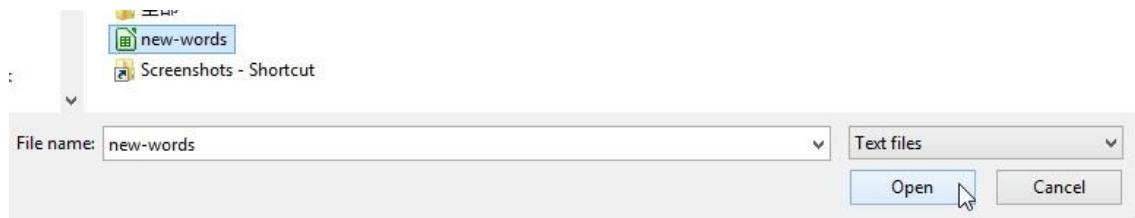
1. Expression

2. Reading
3. Definition: Highest Priority
4. Example Sentences (without translation)
5. Example Sentences (translation only)

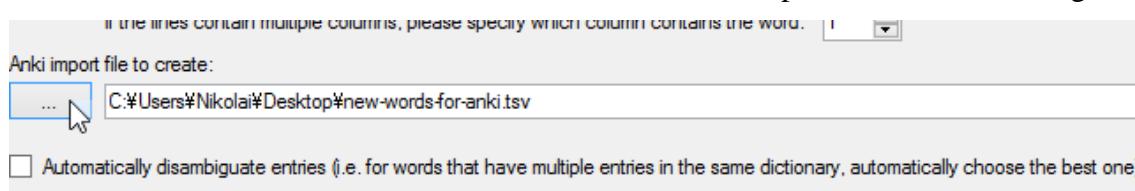
On the next page, I need to select which word list to import. We want to import the LibreOffice Text CSV file that we just had open:

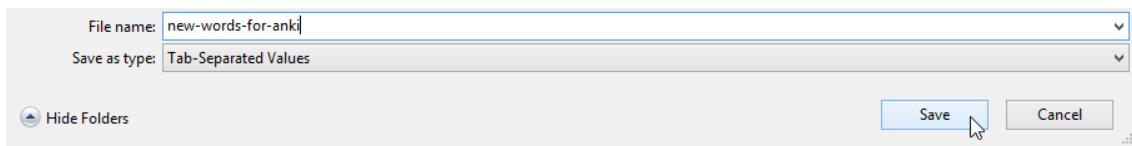


My text file is called “new-words.”

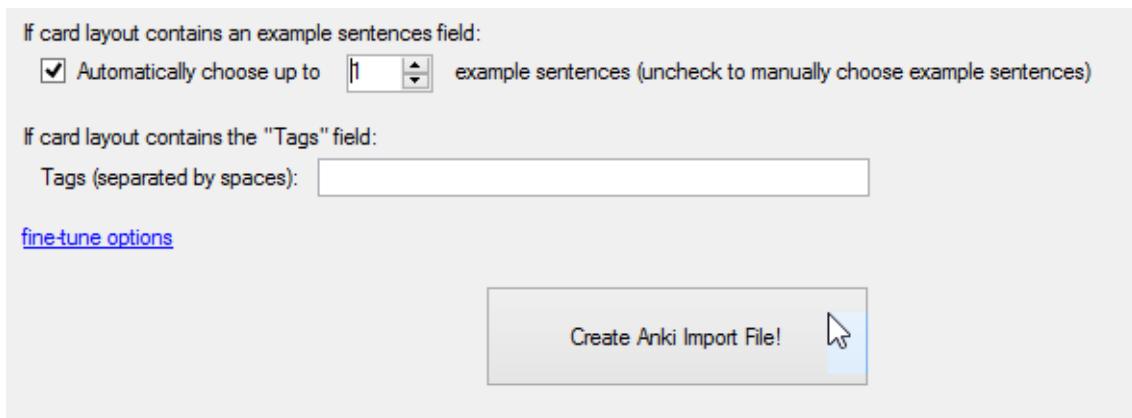


We also need to select the location and name of the Anki import file we are creating:





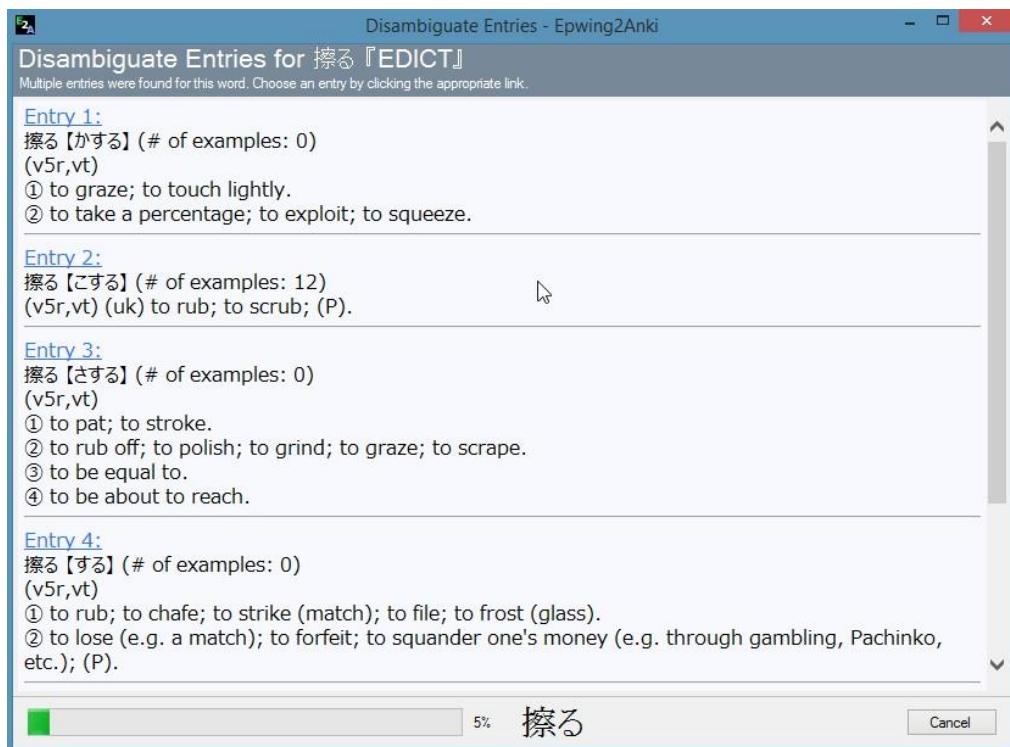
Set it to only import 1 example sentence (you also have the option of importing them manually):



If everything looks okay, let's click “Create Anki Import File!”

And thus, the magic begins.

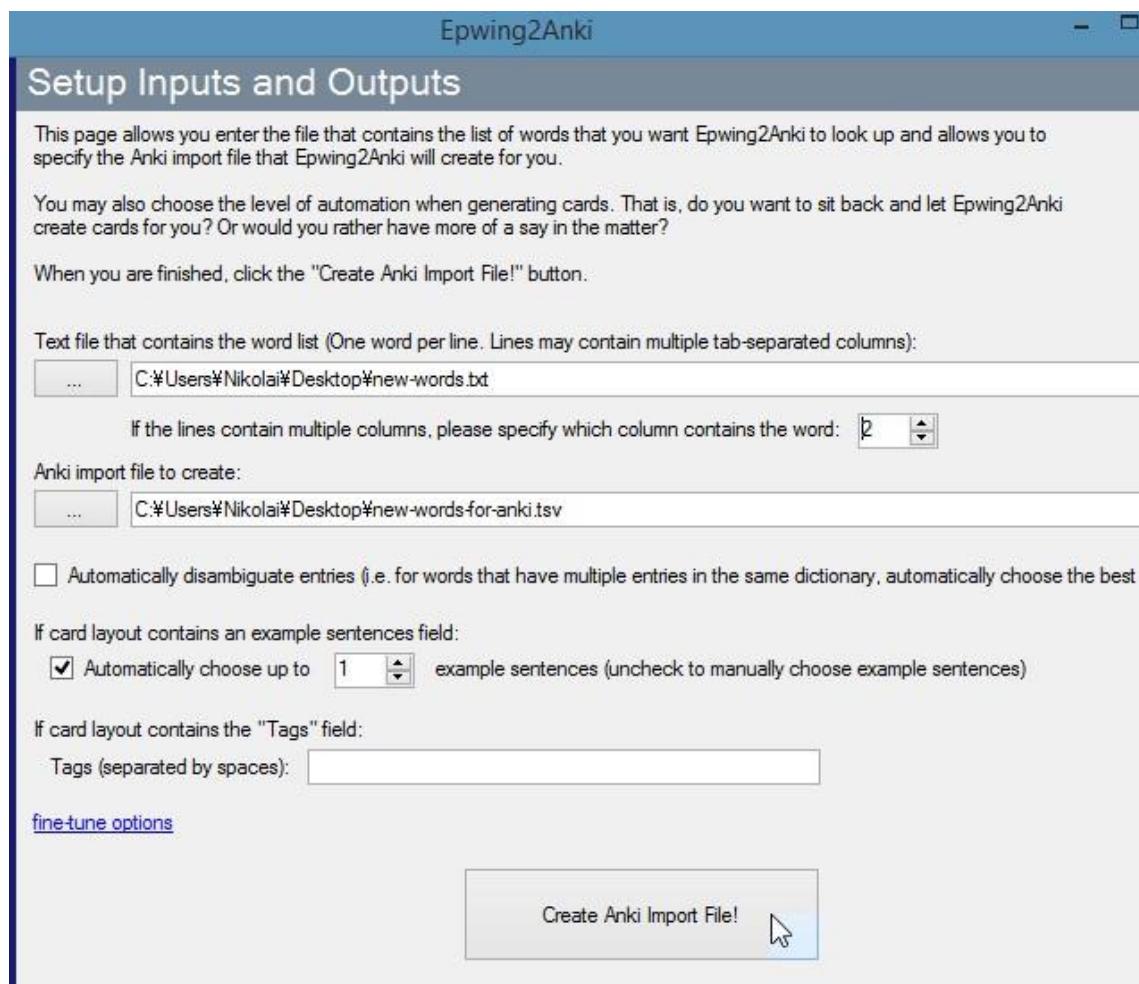
[EPWing2Anki](#) will warn me when it comes across ambiguous data. In these cases, I can select the word that I was hoping to learn (usually the one that has the most example sentences available):



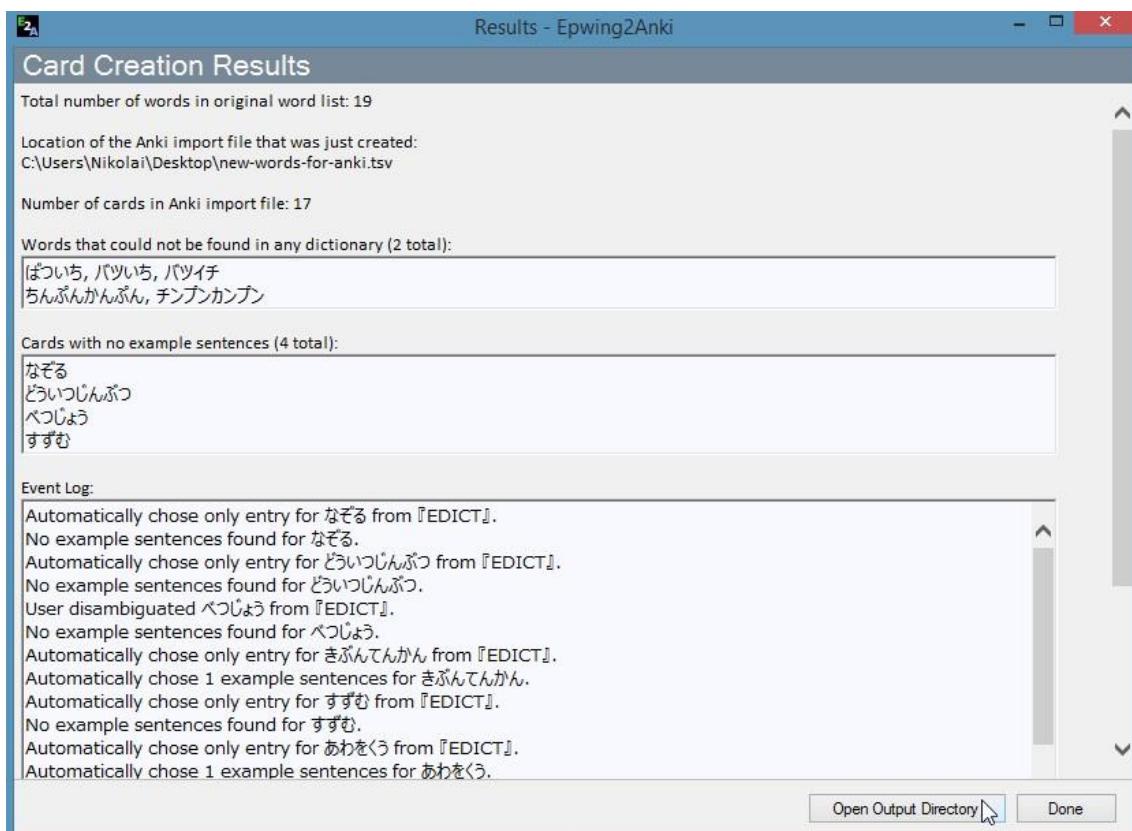
At the end, the program will tell me the results. As you can see, this was kind of a failure:



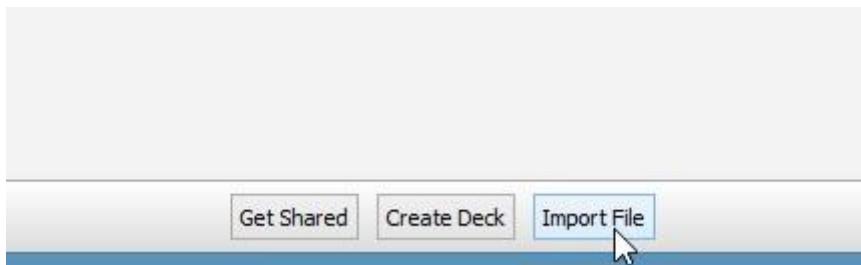
Seven words had no card created, and two words had no example sentence found. This could be because I was importing from the first column of the word document, which was using kanji. So this time I'll import from the second column, which contains only hiragana:



I click “Create Anki Import File!” again, and it gets to work. Since it’s all in hiragana, there will be more entries that I need to disambiguate. My results were a little better this time, as I was able to make cards for all but two of the words in the list:



Since the second list that I created was better, this is the one that I'm going to import into my Anki deck. So, I open up Anki, then I click the "Import File" button at the bottom of the screen:



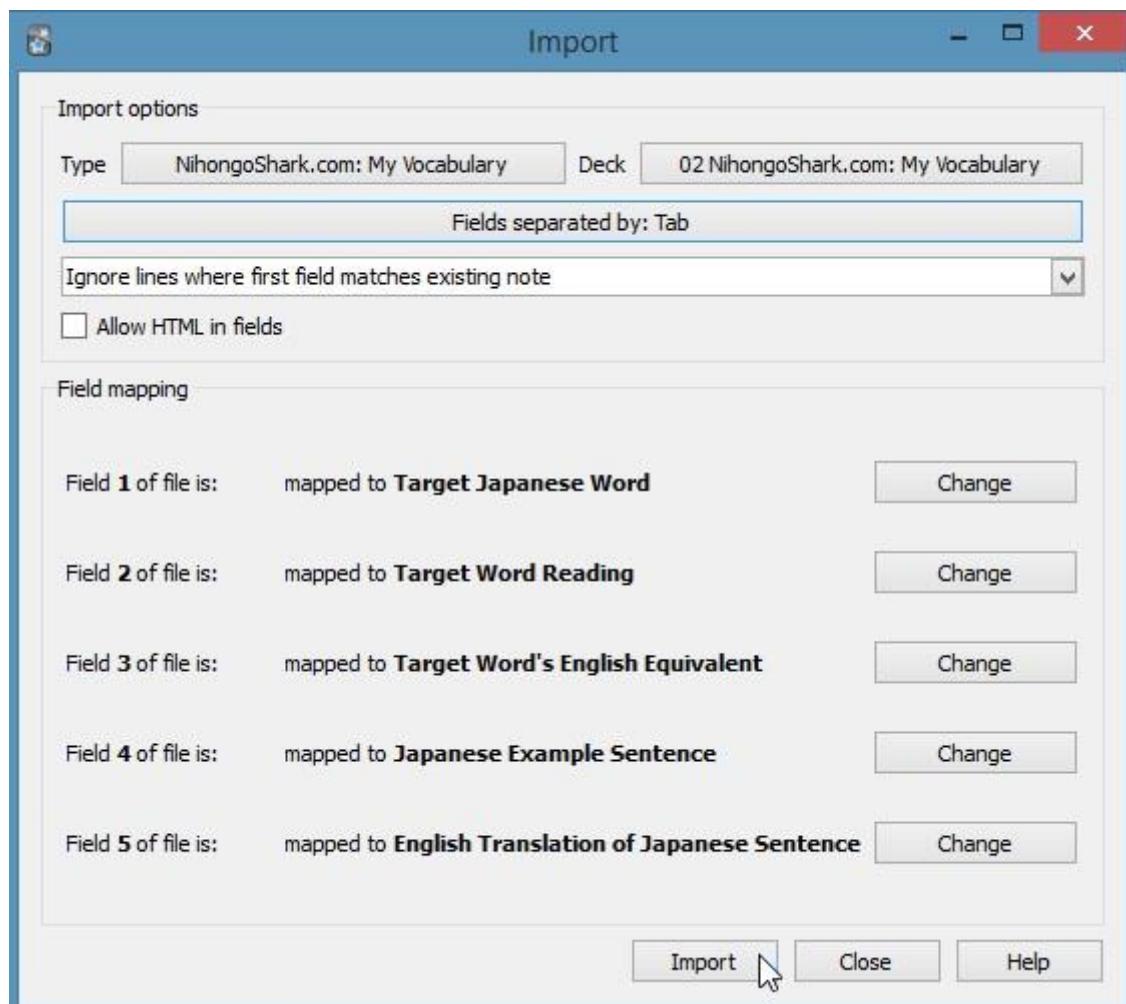
Anki will ask me what file to import. Be sure that the file type is text separated by tabs:



Anki will look at this file, but it wants to know which word goes into which field on my

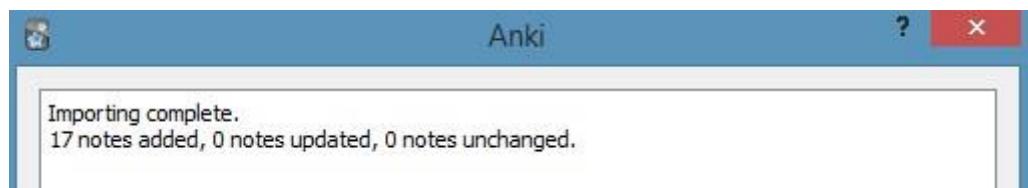
cards. This should line up the same way it does in the columns of the spreadsheet. If you've followed my advice exactly, then it should already be lined up perfectly.

Make sure that you are importing to the "My Vocabulary" deck using the "My Vocabulary" card type:



When you're ready, click "Import."

If everything is set up okay, then Anki should have no problem uploading all (in this case, 17) words:



I can now click “Browse” for this deck, and I’ll see that there are new cards in it! Sweet!

Sort Field	Card	Due	Deck	Created
あやしい	Reading	2015-02-06	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-06
すうはいしゅ	Reading	19	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
まるきり	Reading	18	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
めしつかい	Reading	17	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
とりこ	Reading	16	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
あおる	Reading	15	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07

Next, I select all of the new cards so that I can add audio to them:

Sort Field	Card	Due	Deck	Created
しょうげん	Reading	2	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-06
なぞる	Reading	3	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
どういつじんぶつ	Reading	4	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
べつじょう	Reading	5	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
きぶんでんかん	Reading	6	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
すずむ	Reading	7	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
あわきく	Reading	8	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
じんたい	Reading	9	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
かんいべづ	Reading	10	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
すばめける	Reading	11	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
おやめすり	Reading	12	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
かうとう	Reading	13	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
あつねき	Reading	14	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
あおる	Reading	15	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
とりこ	Reading	16	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
めしつかい	Reading	17	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
まるきり	Reading	18	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
すうはいしゅ	Reading	19	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-07
あやしい	Reading	2015-02-06	02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	2015-02-06

After selecting everything, there is an option under “AwesomeTTS” at the top to “Add Audio to Selected...”

A screenshot of the AwesomeTTS application interface. At the top, there's a toolbar with icons for 'Mark', 'Suspend', and 'Change'. Below the toolbar is a list of notes. A context menu is open over the second note, showing options: 'Add Audio to Selected...' (highlighted with a cursor) and 'Remove Audio from Selected...'. The list of notes is as follows:

Sort Field	Card	Due	Notes
しょうげん	Reading	2	02 Ni
なぞる	Reading	3	02 Ni
どういつじんぶつ	Reading	4	02 Ni
べつじょう	Reading	5	02 Ni
きぶんてんかん	Reading	6	02 Ni
すずむ	Reading	7	02 Ni

Clicking this will bring up the AwesomeTTS dialogue. Check to make sure that the Source Field is set to “Japanese Example Sentence,” and the Destination Field is set to “Audio.”

The screenshot shows the 'Add TTS Audio to Selected Notes' dialogue box. It has two main sections: 'Configure Service' on the left and 'Preview' and 'Fields and Handling' on the right.

**Configure Service:**

- Generate using: ImTranslator
- Pass the following to ImTranslator:
  - Voice: VW Misaki (female ja)
  - Speed: normal [default]
- ImTranslator text-to-speech web portal (11 voices)

**Preview:**

type a phrase to test...

**Fields and Handling:**

18 notes selected. Click "Help" for usage hints.

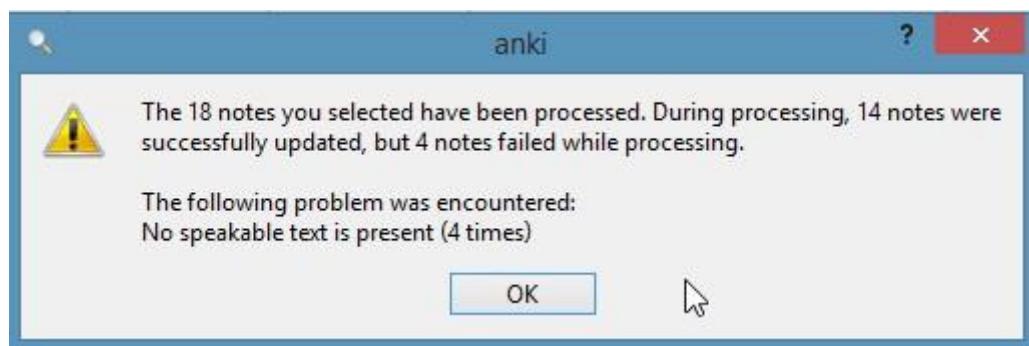
Source Field: Japanese Example Sentence

Destination Field: Audio

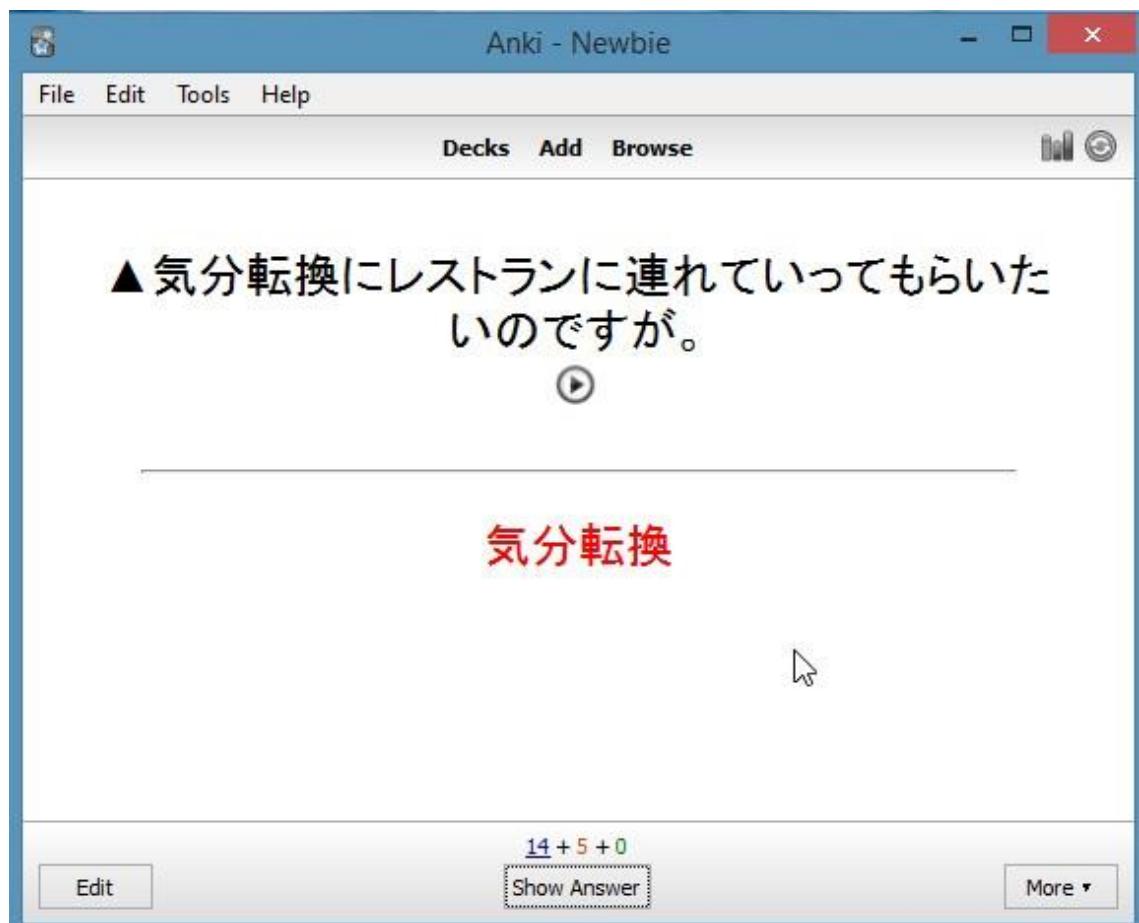
Append [sound:xxx] Tag onto Destination Field  
 Overwrite the Destination Field w/ Media Filename  
 Wrap the Filename in [sound:xxx] Tag

Quickly access this service later?

When you’re ready, cross your fingers and click “Generate.” This round was guaranteed to have four errors, because four of those words we imported don’t have any example sentences:



Now the next time I go to study, I have some beautiful new cards in my deck:



Anki - Newbie

File Edit Tools Help

Decks Add Browse

▲ 気分転換にレストランに連れて行ってもらいたいのですが。

▲ I wish you would take me to a restaurant for a change.

▶

---

氣分転換 きぶんてんかん

(n) change of pace; change of mood;  
(mental) break (e.g. going for a walk);  
refreshment; (P).

---

初耳: 

Look up 気分転換 on...

\* [Jisho.org](#) \*

\* [Weblio.jp](#) \*

\* [HonyakuStar.com](#) \*

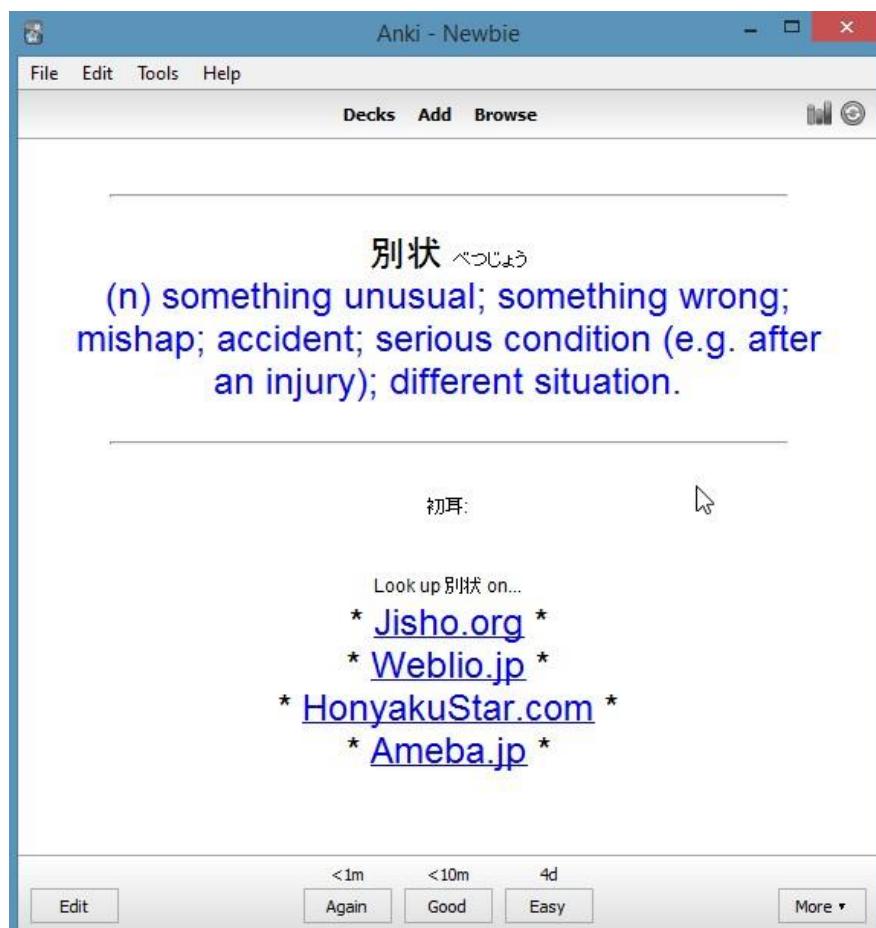
\* [Ameba.jp](#) \*

◀ ▶

Edit Again Good Easy More ▾



Unfortunately, I also have some ugly cards with no example sentences and no audio:



But I can always clean these up later as I'm reviewing.

The downside to all of this is that I still don't have a card for ちんぶんかんぶん! This is just because [EPWing2Anki](#) couldn't find it in any dictionaries. I guess sometimes there's simply no getting around creating our own cards. (ちんぶんかんぶん means like "unintelligible nonsense," by the way).

Anyways...

#### *Phase #3 Assignment*

1. Download the [Blank NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck](#).
2. When you encounter new words in your studies, add them to your deck (either manually or using [imi wa?](#) + [EPWing2Anki](#)).
3. Study your review cards that are due every single day.
4. Study your new cards when you have time.

#### *Setting Up Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Decks*



Automated deck generation is cool and all, but isn't there an even easier way for us extra lazy types?

Why yes, my dear. There is.

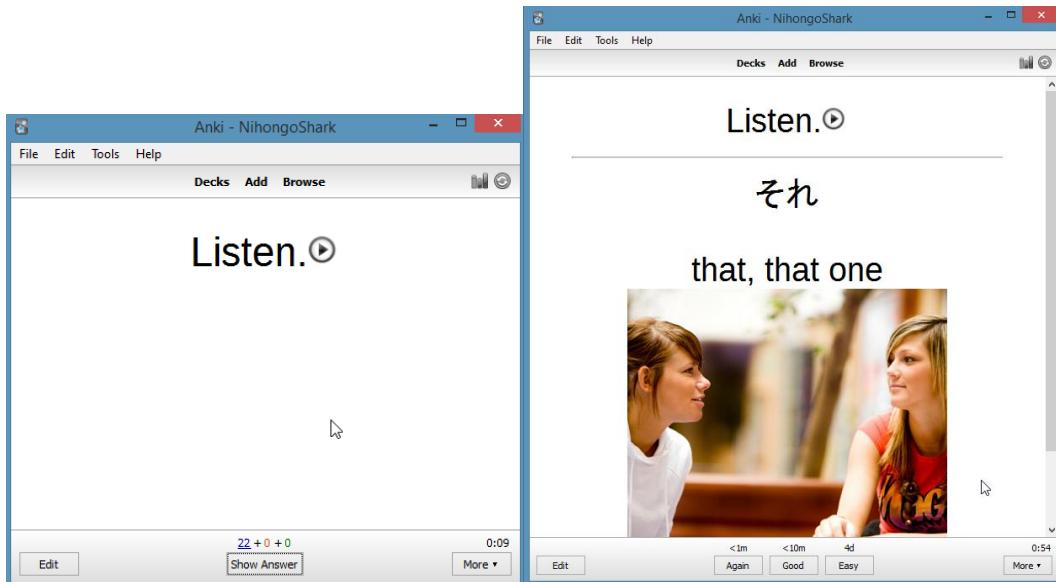
We can just mooch off of the hard work of other people who spent hours upon hours making decks for us. I have set up a pre-loaded Anki deck that I think is perfect for taking your vocabulary level from beginner to intermediate. This deck is the combination of a series of decks, which you can download from Anki's shared decks database.

- NihongoShark.com Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Deck
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 01-10 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
- Original Decks:
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 01 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 02 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 03 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 04 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 05 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 06 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 07 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 08 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 09 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)
  - ✧ [Japanese Core 2000 Step 10 Listening Sentence Vocab + Images](#)

If you download the original decks, which are split into ten separate files, you'll find that the formatting is a bit different from mine. Namely, those decks have three types of flashcards: Listening, Production, and Reading, but mine also has one type of card.

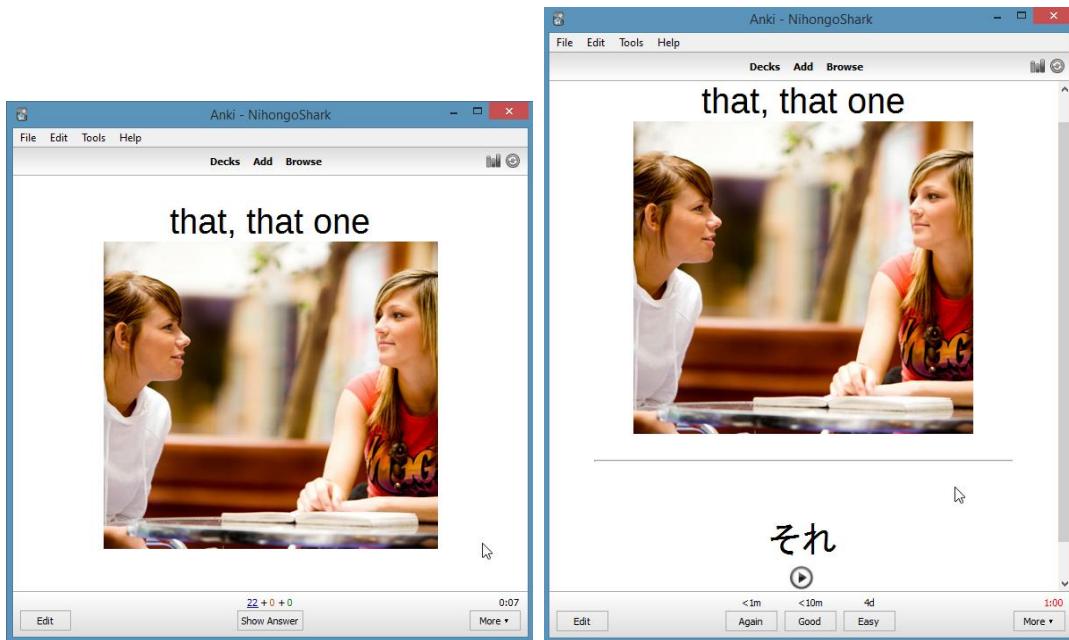
Listening refers to a card with only audio for the front side, then you guess what the meaning is. Like this...

### Listening Card, Front Side (Left) / Listening Card, Back Side (Right)



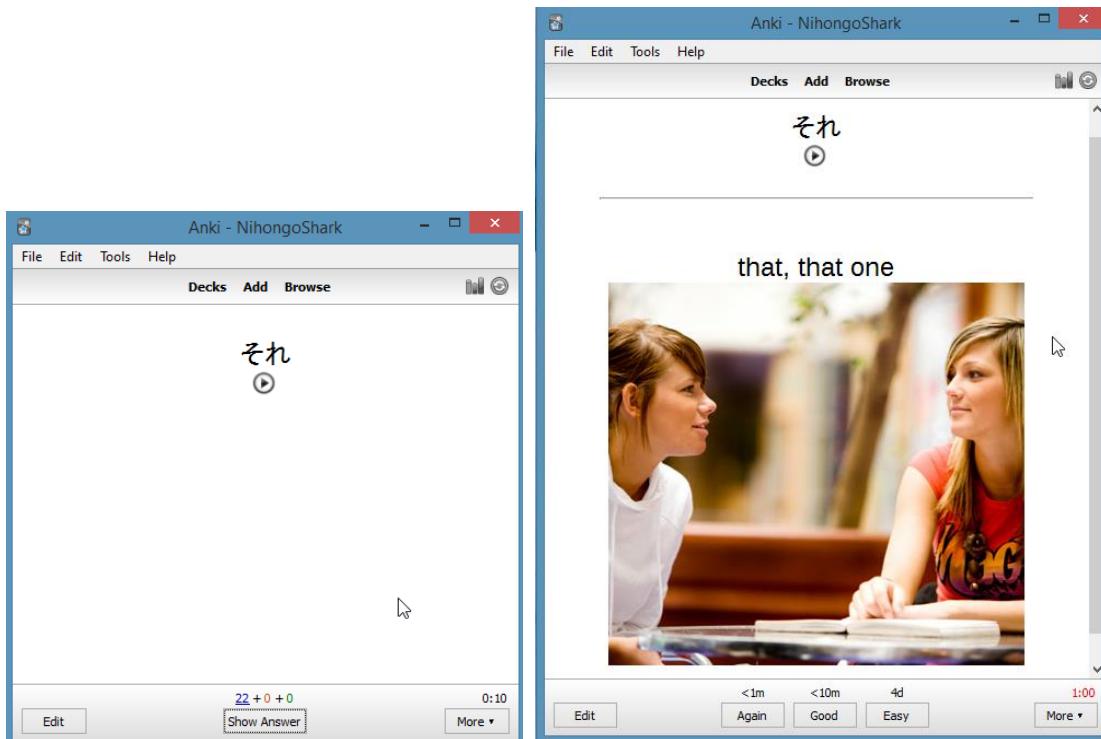
A Production Card is a card where you go from English to Japanese, like this...

### Production Card, Front Side (Left) / Production Card, Back Side (Right)



A Reading Card is where you go from Japanese to English (or Japanese to Japanese), like this...

### Reading Card, Front Side (Left) / Reading Card, Back Side (Right)



If you download the original decks, they will have all three types of these cards. If you download my deck, however, *it will only have reading cards*.

### Using Flashcards for Recognition

There are a lot of reasons that I only use “Reading Cards” for my vocabulary decks. The biggest reason is that I think listening and production decks are a waste of time. **The only reason that I study flashcards is to increase my knowledge of Japanese.** As far as I’m concerned, increasing my knowledge means learning new words and concepts.

If I have a deck that includes Listening, Production, and Reading Cards, then I have to study three cards to learn one word, so studying 30 cards will increase my vocabulary by 10 words. But if I’m only studying Reading Cards, then I can learn one word per card, and studying 30 cards increases my vocabulary by 30 words. (This explanation doesn’t even account for the fact that this deck has “vocabulary word” cards and “example sentence” cards, so actually you have to study 60 cards to learn 10 words in the original decks and 20 cards to learn 10 words in my altered version.)

I think that Reading Cards are more important than Listening Cards, because **the best way to increase listening comprehension is to increase vocabulary**. Period. Japanese is super easy to pronounce, and spoken Japanese is super easy to catch (once you've been exposed to it for a while)... if you know every single word in a sentence. But if you don't know every single word in a sentence, then not knowing just one word can throw you off entirely. From my perspective, this means that studying Reading Cards (i.e. increasing my vocabulary as quickly as possible) is more likely to improve my listening comprehension than Listening Cards would. If you disagree, however, please download the original decks and not mine.

I think that Reading Cards are more important than Production Cards, because Japanese and English don't match up well. Jumping between any two languages, there will always be a variety of acceptable translations, so I don't see the point in only memorizing a single translation. Instead, I like to focus on the Japanese first and foremost (Reading Cards), and I get a sense of how words are used in sentences, what their meaning is, etc. When I'm reviewing my Reading Cards in Anki, I don't even look at the answer side of the card unless I didn't know the answer. Usually, I'm just reading the front side, confirming that I know the meaning in my head, and moving on. With only Reading Cards, during reviews **everything that's happening in my head is in Japanese only**.

There is an argument that forcing yourself to form sentences as you study Anki will help you to memorize sentence patterns and be a better speaker of Japanese. I don't disagree with this, either. However, I think that increasing my understanding of Japanese is *always* priority #1, because the faster I increase my understanding, the more I can immerse myself in interesting "study" materials like books, TV shows, movies, manga, and anime that actual Japanese people are interacting with *for fun*. Because I have worked so much on increasing my recognition of the language, it's easy for me to have fun with it, which means that it's easy for me to enjoy studying, even when I don't feel like "studying," per se.

Finally, if your only goal is to be able to communicate and make effective, accurate sentences, then I think your "Production" focus should be on actual conversations in Japanese using online lessons from [italki](#), [Cafetalk](#), your [language exchange partners](#), etc. But, again, if you disagree, then you should probably download the original decks linked

to above.

One major downside to this giant pre-loaded deck that I've uploaded is that it will probably take 100 years to download if your internet connection is slow, because it's quite a big file (over 200MB). I guess that's what happens when every single word has an audio file and an image to go alongside it.

### *Phase #3 Assignment*

1. Download [the Pre-Loaded NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck](#).
2. Study your review cards that are due every single day.
3. Study your new cards when you have time.

### *Daily Flashcard Flow*

If you've gotten this far, then take a moment to congratulate yourself, because **you have successfully set up every single deck that you will need for at least your first year of Japanese studies**. Bossossity! If you're still missing one, here's a [link to all three of them](#).

I want to talk about our daily flashcard flow, but before I do that, let's take another look at the 1-year schedule that's laid out in this guide, should you choose to follow it exactly:

Time Period	Length	Activity
<b>Week #1</b> <b>(Phase #1)</b>	1 Week	Prep Your Ninja Tools
<b>Week #2-16</b> <b>(Phase #2)</b>	14 Weeks (~3.25 Months)	Learn Pronunciation, Hiragana, Katakana, & Kanji
<b>Week #17-52</b> <b>(Phase #3)</b>	35 Weeks (~8 Months)	Build a Foundational Knowledge of Japanese

This timeline is an estimate, and the truth is that some of the phases are likely to overlap. For example, it's actually okay to study vocabulary as you're studying the kanji in Phase #2, only in that case your only daily priority is learning and reviewing kanji. In other

words, on your daily chain calendar (should you choose to start it in Phase #2), you could put an X simply for reviewing all of the kanji that were due, plus learning 22 new kanji (or whatever amount of kanji you're trying to learn per day). Then, once you enter Phase #3, you could only give yourself an X if you reviewed all of the kanji and vocabulary cards that were due, plus you learned 30 new vocabulary cards (or whatever number you choose). That might sound kind of confusing, but here's a breakdown:

#### Phase #2 Daily Flashcard Flow & Priorities\*

1. ALL Kanji Review Cards
2. 22 New Kanji Cards
3. My Vocabulary Review Cards (optional)
4. Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Review Cards (optional)
5. My Vocabulary New Cards (optional)
6. Pre-Loaded Vocabulary New Cards (optional)

\*This is assuming that I'm trying to learn 22 new kanji per day, thus finishing all of the Joyo Kanji in 97 days. I must do numbers #1-2 every day if I want to get a blue X on my calendar.

These priorities are slightly different than what will happen in Phase #3. For example, let's say that I want to study 6,000 vocabulary flashcards before the end of my first year of studying (This would not be 6,000 words, because the 4,000 cards in my pre-loaded deck only have around 2,000 new words in them, so all together (adding words throughout my studies and possibly other pre-loaded decks) I would learn around 4,000 words. That's not quite enough to pass JLPT N2, but you'd still be at a pretty solid level of Japanese. To reach this level within our 1-year study plan, you'd need to study about 25 new vocabulary cards per day from Phase #3 onward. You can actually set any goals that you'd like, but here's what your daily flashcard flow and priorities would look like if you were to set that as a goal:

### Phase #3 Daily Flashcard Flow & Priorities\*

1. ALL Kanji Review Cards
2. ALL My Vocabulary Review Cards
3. ALL Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Review Cards
4. ALL New Kanji Cards\*\*
5. 25 My Vocabulary New Cards
6. 0-25 Pre-Loaded Vocabulary New Cards\*\*\*

\*This is assuming that I'm trying to learn 25 new vocabulary cards per day, thus learning 6,000+ vocabulary cards within my first year. This is in addition to the 2,200 kanji flashcards I will already have learned in Phase #2. I must do numbers #1-6\*\*\* every day if I want to get a blue X on my calendar.

\*\*On most days, the number of new kanji cards will be zero, but there will be some occasions when you come across a non-Joyo kanji that you want to memorize. After adding it to your kanji deck, should you choose to do so, it would take priority over other new cards, but still come after all review cards.

\*\*\*If "My Vocabulary Deck" has more than 25 new cards, then I only need to do numbers #1-5, because I would hit my New Cards requirement for the day. But if I get down to zero new cards in "My Vocabulary Deck," then I would be doing 25 new cards from my pre-loaded vocabulary deck. The new vocabulary cards that I've created personally will always take priority over the new pre-loaded vocabulary cards. However, review cards from the pre-loaded deck take priority over new cards from my personally created vocabulary deck.

That might sound like an overly complicated system, but I think that you'll find that it's quite simple and logical if you give it a try for a few months.

#### *Be Careful Not to Overload New Cards*

The target we set above for Phase #3 is 25 new cards per day. There will probably be some days when you have a lot of free time or are feeling very motivated, and you might want to study 50 new vocabulary cards. You're totally welcome to do this, but be careful

not to overdo it with the amount of new cards that you add each day.

As you'll probably notice over the course of Phase #2, consistently studying large numbers of new cards on a daily basis really stacks up in the amount of daily review cards. **If you find yourself getting overwhelmed by the amount of daily review cards, then take a break from new cards for a while.** It's fun to have lofty goals (*I'm gonna learn 50 new words a day!*), but those goals can be counter-productive if they end up overwhelming you and causing you to fail to study your daily review cards.

### *How to Retain Vocabulary*

There are a lot of people out there who hate on SRS programs like Anki. A computer program can only help you so much, they say. And, to a certain extent, I agree with these people. Looking at words on a computer screen is not the most effective way to learn individual words. However, it's the best way I know of to systematically retain large volumes of words, which is what we're trying to do.

But let's look at some other ways that we can really get these words to stick...

### *Set Aside Focus Words*

---

As you study, you'll come across some words that you'll want to be able to use in conversation, along with words that seem to always give you problems.

If you're doing flashcards on your phone, you can always take screenshots of these words, then look at them in a photos folder when you're bored and have nothing to do. It's like double Anki!

You can also set them aside in a list of "words I want to use," for example, and you can try to use them the next time you take a lesson on [italki](#), write a journal entry on [Lang-8](#), or talk to your cat.

### *Use It or Lose It*

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The other day, I was reading a very interesting article on [How to Learn Spanish Online](#) titled, "[How to Learn Vocabulary, Especially Foreign Language Vocab – And I Mean LEARN, Not Just Memorize.](#)" Yeah, it's kind of a long title. If you have some free time,

I recommend reading the entire article. If you're feeling lazy daisy, though, I'll just sum up some key points that I think are quite helpful for learning vocabulary words.

Like any BA language site these days, the author of that article does in fact recommend using Anki... because, well, it's awesome. At the same time, however, he points out there learning and memorizing are quite different concepts.

For example, I have over 17,000 Japanese flashcards. Of those, I'd guess that around 14,000 are vocabulary words. I feel pretty comfortable saying that I know and understand at least 14,000 Japanese words. However, there is no way that I can use that many in conversations. There is a huge difference between being able to understand a word and being able to use a word. **Just because you study a bunch of vocabulary on Anki does not mean that you'll be able to use those vocabulary when interacting with Japanese people.**

Granted, there are times when I suddenly blurt out a word that is in my flashcards for the first time, and I feel quite proud of myself, but usually when I gain the ability to use a word in a sentence that I've created, it's thanks to a bit of extra attention and effort.

In that article about learning Spanish words above, there is quite a bit about substituting words for others that you can visualize and using a variety of mnemonics similar to those I talked about earlier in this guide. Personally, I've never gone above and beyond trying to "learn" vocabulary words. I just make lists of words I want to be able to use, then I make an effort to use them the next time I'm speaking in Japanese.

This is most helpful if you're talking with someone who will correct you, because **there is nothing that will help you remember better than a stupid mistake.** And trust me, we are going to make some stupid mistakes, and people are going to laugh at us. And we'll laugh along and play nice, but deep down we'll feel shame and self-loathing, which are two great tools for memorizing vocabulary.

With that, we're finished with Chain Item #1. Here's a picture of a bald guy with lightning bolts coming out of his head (because, of course):



Moving on...

## Chain Item #2 – Listening Practice

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Each day of Phase #3, once you've finished reviewing your flashcards, you can move onto studying Chain Items 2 & 3, listening and speaking/grammar. These items will probably get quite enmeshed with part of your flashcard approach, because listening and speaking/grammar practice will serve as a source for new words to add to your Anki deck and new kanji to study. Still, **you should not study listening and grammar until you've studied all of the new and review flashcards on Anki for a given day.**

You don't ever want to risk missing a day of new and review flashcards, because it will jeopardize this entire mastery plan. It's not the end of the world if you go a day without studying listening and/or grammar. It is the end of the world if you go a day without doing your (review) flashcards.

With all that flashcard business aside, then, let's talk about listening practice.

**Chain Item #2 is great, because it's so simple: 1 audio lesson per day, minimum.**

As you know, I prefer [JapanesePod101](#), but there are a plethora of other options available as well. However, since JapanesePod101 is the only audio lesson resource that I use, that's all I'm really capable of explaining in-depth. A lot of the advice I'll give here, however, is applicable to pretty much any suite of audio lessons for any language. So if you find that there is a different audio series that appeals to you, then just apply this advice to that series.

### *Listening Every Day*

The specific “Chain Item” for our calendar is 1 lesson per day. To be honest, though, this is nothing. 1 lesson on [JapanesePod101](#), for example, is only like 15-20 minutes. You probably spend more than that much time commuting to work, school, the grocery store, etc. So just by listening to audio lessons on the train, in your car, etc., you could do all you need in order to get that big, beautiful, blue X on your calendar.

But why stop there? I have found that listening is such a powerful study tool, because it is so easy to integrate into your daily life. For example, recently I've been listening to lessons from [SpanishPod101](#), and I listen to them on my walk to the gym (30 minutes), at the gym (45 minutes to an hour), and my walk home from the gym (30 minutes). Yeah, I spend way too much time going to the gym. But it doesn't feel like I'm wasting any time at all, because I'm combining two forms of productivity. **I listen to around 2 hours of audio lessons per day just by going to the gym.** Doing that, I can easily rack up over 500 hours of audio lessons in under a year. And I'm probably racking up much more than that if I also take into account the hours I spend walking around [whatever city I'm living in].

### *Pick Your Listening Environment(s)*

The trick, I think, is to get used to putting on your headphones every time you're alone and not able to focus on something 100%. That's why I listen to audio lessons when I'm walking, exercising, driving, or riding public transportation. The situation that I'm in does not allow for 100% focus on study materials. I can't exactly pull out a grammar textbook while I'm running on the treadmill. This is called “low quality time,” and we talked about it [back in Phase #1](#).

A great way to be sure that you get lots of listening practice is to decide ahead of time where and when you will listen to your audio lessons each day.

Here are some examples of times and places that I have listened to audio lesson in the past:

- ✧ Every time I clean the house.
- ✧ Every time I drive anywhere in my car (alone).
- ✧ Every time I ride the train (alone).
- ✧ In bed, as I fall asleep.
- ✧ Going for walks.
- ✧ Going for runs.
- ✧ At the gym.
- ✧ Every time I eat lunch.
- ✧ During my breaks at work.
- ✧ Before work (I used to get to work early, and then sit in my car for 1 lesson).

These are just a handful of examples, and the places and times that you choose will naturally be different than the places that I have chosen in the past.

Once you choose where and when you'll be listening to your audio lessons, you should...

### *[Remove All Barriers to Listening](#)*

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I remember a few years ago I decided that every time I drove in my car, I was going to listen to audio lessons. However, I kept flaking and listening to music (or nothing) instead. The reason was that every time I got into my car, it seemed like a hassle to plug my phone into the stereo and play a podcast. I know that sounds ridiculous, because it only takes five seconds, but five seconds feels like a long time when you're only planning to be in the car for two minutes anyways. Add to that the fact that I had to muster up the willpower to decide to listen to audio lessons every time I got into my car.

After only a couple of weeks, I was pretty much never listening to audio lessons at all. So I decided to burn [JapanesePod101](#) lessons onto CDs, and I always had a CD in my car playing. Once I did this, the lessons came on automatically every time I started the car, and my listening consistency went up exponentially. **I had removed the barriers to my**

**study habit, and it had become effortless.** And ever since then, I have always tried to remove barriers to studying whenever possible.

Barriers differ from person to person and situation to situation, but I think it's a good idea to try to explore what the barriers are to you listening to audio lessons regularly, and then you should try to knock them down in order to allow for effortless studying. I'll list some examples to give you ideas. You'll probably hate some of them, but I'm not saying that you need to do them. It's totally up to you which barriers you decide to tear down and which ones you just can't bear to let go of:

Goal	Barrier	Solution
Listen to audio lessons every time I drive my car (alone).	Plugging in my phone to play audio lessons is a hassle.	Burn CDs and always have one playing in the car. / Put audio lessons on an old mp3 player and always have it plugged in and ready to go.
Listen to audio lessons in the train on the way to work every day.	I'd rather listen to music. / I'd rather browse [waste-of-time app].	Delete music and time-wasting apps. / Delete music from phone.
Listen to audio lessons every time I clean the house.	It's uncomfortable to have headphones in when I'm moving around the house.	Buy a cheap stereo, put it in my [living room], then just press play on some audio lesson goodness every time I'm cleaning.
Listen to audio lessons every time I eat lunch (at home).	It's uncomfortable to have headphones in when I'm eating. / I like watching things when I eat.	Listen to the lessons on a stereo. / Watch video lessons. / Have video lessons ready to go at the [place I always eat lunch].

Your barriers will probably be unique to your situation, but once you encounter them, please take a serious look at how you might be able to tear them down. **Tearing down one obtrusive barrier could mean adding hundreds of hours of effortless study time to the next year of your life.**

## *Level-Appropriate Listening*

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When it comes to things like “immersion learning,” this concept that you should simply expose yourself to the language as much as possible, I see a lot of people wasting a lot of time. A great example of this is when people say that they can learn Japanese by watching anime.

**If a study resource, especially a listening resource, is far above your level, then it does not qualify as study material.** Speaking of Japanese TV shows in particular, if you don’t understand at least 50% of what’s being said, then you’re not improving your Japanese by watching.

I’m not saying that you should give up on watching your favorite Japanese TV shows. After all, wanting to understand what’s being said is great motivation for actually studying. In fact, I think that there are productive ways that we can use Japanese materials that are way above our level.

For example, let’s say that I’m still a beginner at Japanese, but I really love a particular anime. It’s my favorite show, and I’ve seen it 8,000 times, and I’d be happy to watch it over and over again for eternity until I die. In this situation, **the following is a waste of time:**

- ❖ Watching that show with English subtitles.
- ❖ Watching that show without subtitles.
- ❖ Watching that show with Japanese subtitles.

Yes, I think that all of these are a waste of time. Remember that I’m still a beginner at Japanese. If I watch the show with English subtitles, I’ll always end up reading them and forgetting to listen to the Japanese. If I watch the show without subtitles, I won’t understand anything! If I watch the show with Japanese subtitles, it might be helpful depending on my understanding of kanji, but even then the words would be going by so quickly that I’d have no time to give them the proper attention they deserve, and 99% of them would end up going over my head.

However, this does not mean that I am completely without productive study options that

utilize this potentially amazing resource. There are some **things that are not a waste of time:**

- ✧ Painfully trudging through the manga series of this anime one page at a time. Since I'm a beginner, this would mean looking up virtually every word in the book. It sounds like torture, maybe, but after you got through twenty books, I bet that you'd start seeing the same words quite a lot.
- ✧ Watching the same episode over and over again. This would include pausing to read and look up subtitles, rewinding to hear the same phrases over and over again, and pretty much memorizing the whole thing word for word.
- ✧ Creating Anki flashcards for this anime series and learning every single phrase that comes up. I'll talk about how to do this later in this guide.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that you don't have to use "audio lessons" if you don't want to. If something like [JapanesePod101](#) or [Assimil](#) or any of those learning resources isn't your thing, then don't force yourself to do it. There are other options like the ones described above. Yes, these options would require a lot more effort on your part, but effort is tied to motivation, and if you really loved that show enough, maybe you would feel motivated enough to go through the processes described above.

Towards the end of this guide, by the way, I'll also go into some detail about other methods of studying Japanese through anime and manga.

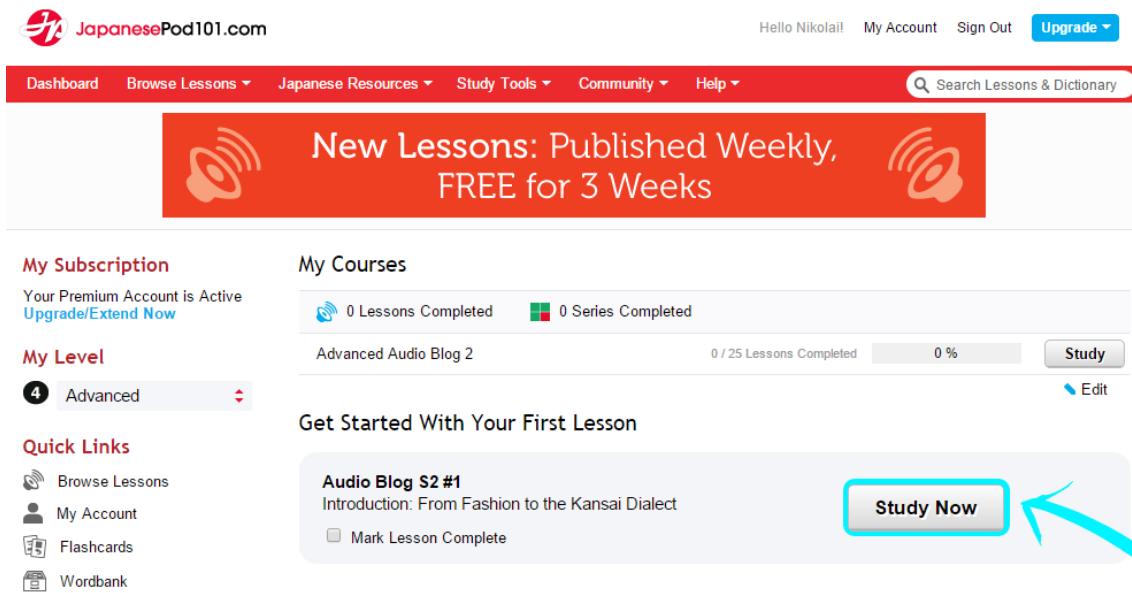
### *[Setting Up Your Audio Lessons](#)*

In this section, I'm going to describe the step-by-step process that I use to study [JapanesePod101](#) audio lessons. I've found that this is the most interesting and effective method for me personally. Of course, you can take whatever approach you like (you might not even want to use [JapanesePod101](#)), but I hope that this proves useful to those of you who are looking for a productive way to integrate these lessons into your life.

This audio lesson tutorial will make use of JapanesePod101's customizable RSS Feeds. At the time of this writing, the only way to use these feeds is to have a Premium or Premium+ Membership, so, yeah... it costs money to do this. I'm sorry, cheapo friends.

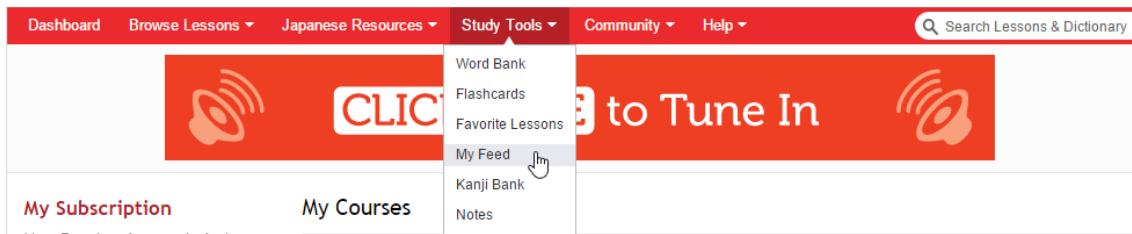
## Step #1 – Pick a level and season.

Here I am on my JapanesePod101 Dashboard:



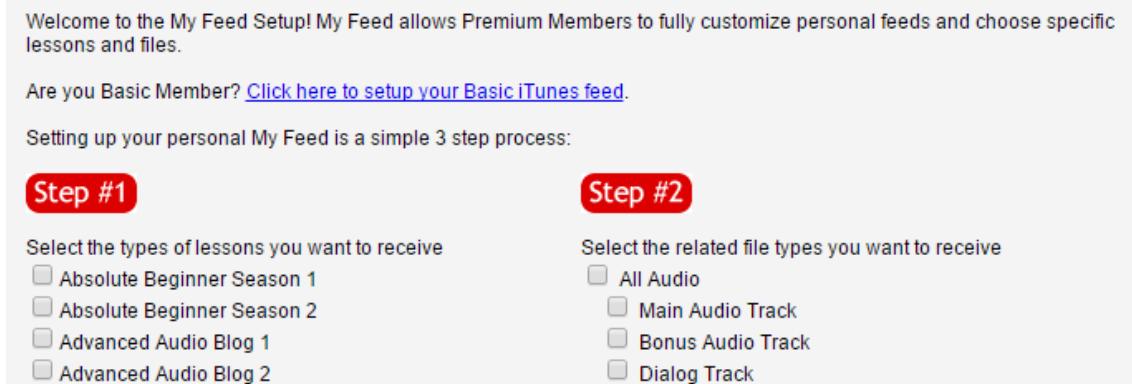
The screenshot shows the JapanesePod101 dashboard. At the top, there's a red banner with the text "New Lessons: Published Weekly, FREE for 3 Weeks" and two speaker icons. Below the banner, the "My Subscription" section shows a "Premium Account is Active" status and a "Upgrade/Extend Now" button. The "My Level" dropdown is set to "Advanced". The "Quick Links" sidebar includes "Browse Lessons", "My Account", "Flashcards", and "Wordbank". The main content area features a "Get Started With Your First Lesson" box for "Audio Blog S2 #1" with a "Study Now" button, which is highlighted with a blue arrow. Other course options like "Advanced Audio Blog 2" are also listed.

To go to My Feeds (i.e. customizable RSS feeds), I go to Study Tools → My Feed:



The screenshot shows the "Study Tools" section of the dashboard. A dropdown menu is open over the "My Feed" link, showing options like "Word Bank", "Flashcards", "Favorite Lessons", "My Feed" (which is highlighted with a cursor icon), "Kanji Bank", and "Notes".

This will bring up a page that includes a list of all the different levels and seasons of JapanesePod101:



The screenshot shows the "My Feed Setup" page. It has two main sections: "Step #1" and "Step #2". In "Step #1", there's a list of lesson types with checkboxes: "Absolute Beginner Season 1", "Absolute Beginner Season 2", "Advanced Audio Blog 1", and "Advanced Audio Blog 2". In "Step #2", there's a list of file types with checkboxes: "All Audio", "Main Audio Track", "Bonus Audio Track", and "Dialog Track". A note at the top says "Welcome to the My Feed Setup! My Feed allows Premium Members to fully customize personal feeds and choose specific lessons and files." It also mentions that basic members can click to setup an iTunes feed.

There are a ton of levels, seasons, and lesson types on JapanesePod101, I have to zoom out my browser in order to fit them all on one screen. Here they are side by side:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Absolute Beginner Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Absolute Beginner Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Audio Blog 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Audio Blog 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Audio Blog 3</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Audio Blog 4</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Audio Blog 5</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Audio Blog 6</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> All About</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Basic Japanese</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beginner Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beginner Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beginner Season 3</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beginner Season 4</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beginner Season 5</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beginner Season 6</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Cheat Sheet to Mastering Japanese</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Culture Class: Essential Japanese Vocabulary</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Culture Class: Holidays in Japan</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Everyday Kanji</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Extra Fun</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> iLove J-Drama</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Inner Circle</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Innovative Japanese</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Introduction</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Body Language and Gestures</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Children's Songs</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Counters for Beginners</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Culture Classes</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese for Everyday Life Lower Intermediate</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Listening Comprehension for Absolute Beginners</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Listening Comprehension for Advanced Learners</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Listening Comprehension for Beginners</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Listening Comprehension for Intermediate Learners</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Words of the Week with Risa for Beginners</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese Words of the Week with Risa for Intermediate Learners</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> JLPT Season 1 – Old 4/New N5</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> JLPT Season 2 – New N4</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> JLPT Season 3 – New N3</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Journey Through Japan</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Just For Fun</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Kanji Videos with Hiroko</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Kantan Kana</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Learn Japanese Grammar Video - Absolute Beginner</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Learn with Pictures and Video</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Learn with Video</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Learning Japanese through Posters</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Beginner</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Beginner Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Intermediate Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Intermediate Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Intermediate Season 3</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Intermediate Season 4</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Intermediate Season 5</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower Intermediate Season 6</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Must-Know Japanese Holiday Words</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Newbie Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Newbie Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Newbie Season 3</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Newbie Season 4</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Newbie Season 5</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> News</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Onomatopoeia</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Particles</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Prototype Lessons</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Survival Phrases Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Survival Phrases Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Throwback Thursday</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Top 25 Japanese Questions You Need to Know</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Beginner Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate Season 2</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate Season 3</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate Season 4</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate Season 5</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Video Culture Class: Japanese Holidays</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Video Vocab Season 1</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Yojijukugo</li></ul>	

Downloading Customized RSS feeds is a 3-step process. We have to (1) select the lesson type (i.e. Level & Season), (2) select the file type (e.g. “dialogue only,” “main audio track,” “PDF,” etc.) and (3) write a name for the feed:

**Step #1**

Select the types of lessons you want to receive

**Step #2**

Select the related file types you want to receive

**Step #3**

Enter a unique name for your My Feed: (Required)

Looking at that huge list of available lessons, you might be feeling a bit overwhelmed about where to begin.

At least for the beginner stages, lessons follow a pretty steady progression. Once you get to intermediate level, you might want to spice up your studies with lessons series focusing on things like “Particles,” “Yojijukugo,” “Onomatopoeia,” “JLPT Prep,” etc.

If you’re having trouble deciding which lessons you want to download first, it can help to look through them a bit in your browser. To do this, I go to **Browse Lessons** → **Audio Lessons**.



This will take me to the lesson interface, and on the left side of the page, there is a list of the different levels:



The screenshot shows the 'Browse Lessons' section of the JapanesePod101 website. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Dashboard', 'Browse Lessons ▾', and 'JapanesePod101'. Below this, the 'Browse Lessons' heading is followed by a list of categories. Each category is represented by a colored circle (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, or a star) and a title. Some categories have a 'NEW' badge. The 'Introduction' category is listed under the '0' heading. The 'Absolute Beginner' category is highlighted with a yellow circle and a 'NEW' badge. The 'Beginner', 'Intermediate', 'Advanced', and 'News & Announcements' categories are listed under their respective numbered headings. The 'Bonus Courses' category is listed under a star icon.

- 0 Introduction
- Culture Class: Holidays in Japan NEW
- Introduction
- All About
- Japanese Culture Classes
- 1 Absolute Beginner
- 2 Beginner
- 3 Intermediate
- 4 Advanced
- ★ Bonus Courses
- News & Announcements

If you're new to [JapanesePod101](#), you might want to warm up with some of the Introduction lessons. Those aren't strictly language lessons, however, so they're not really the focus of our customized RSS feeds, which will be the core lesson series.

For the core lesson series, here is our targeted progression. If this is your first encounter with Japanese, it's probably best to just start at the very beginning and work your way through one lesson at a time:

<b>1 Absolute Beginner</b>	▼
Survival Phrases Season 1	
Survival Phrases Season 2	
Newbie Season 1	
Newbie Season 2	
Newbie Season 3	
Newbie Season 4	
Newbie Season 5	
Absolute Beginner Season 1	
Absolute Beginner Season 2	
Top 25 Japanese Questions You Need to Know	
Culture Class: Essential Japanese Vocabulary	

<b>2 Beginner</b>	▼
Beginner Season 1	
Beginner Season 2	
Beginner Season 3	
Beginner Season 4	
Beginner Season 5	
Beginner Season 6	
Lower Beginner	
Lower Beginner Season 2	NEW
Upper Beginner Season 1	

<b>3 Intermediate</b>	▼
Japanese for Everyday Life Lower Intermediate	
Lower Intermediate Season 1	
Lower Intermediate Season 2	
Lower Intermediate Season 3	
Lower Intermediate Season 4	
Lower Intermediate Season 5	
Lower Intermediate Season 6	
Intermediate Season 1	
Upper Intermediate Season 1	
Upper Intermediate Season 2	
Upper Intermediate Season 3	
Upper Intermediate Season 4	
Upper Intermediate Season 5	

<b>4 Advanced</b>	▼
Advanced Audio Blog 1	
Advanced Audio Blog 2	
Advanced Audio Blog 3	
Advanced Audio Blog 4	
Advanced Audio Blog 5	
Advanced Audio Blog 6	

You might also want to sprinkle in some bonus courses when you feel like spicing things up:

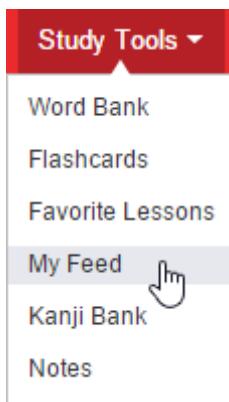


So how do you choose the correct level? Honestly, it's probably going to take some trial and error. Personally, I always like to underestimate my ability when it comes to audio lessons, because listening to lessons that are too difficult can be kind of discouraging and/or exhausting. If you think that you're Intermediate Level, maybe you should take Beginner or Lower Intermediate lessons at first. If you think you're Beginner Level, maybe you should take some Absolute Beginner lessons first. It's more time-effective to study something that is somewhat familiar so that you can drill it into your brain and become more comfortable with it than it is to listen to something overly difficult that you have a super hard time understanding. That's just how I approach these, though. In the end, it's your call.

#### *[Step #2 – Download the full audio for that level and season.](#)*

---

Let's say that after I browse through the content a bit on the site, I decide that I'm going to start with Lower Intermediate lessons, because the Beginner Lessons look way too easy, and the Upper Intermediate Lessons look quite challenging. The first thing I do is go to the My Feed page:



First is Step #1, which is selecting the lesson and season:

### Step #1

Select the types of lessons you want to receive

I'm going to check the box for Lower Intermediate Season 1:

- Lower Beginner
- Lower Beginner Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 1 
- Lower Intermediate Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 3
- Lower Intermediate Season 4
- Lower Intermediate Season 5
- Lower Intermediate Season 6
- Must-Know Japanese Holiday Words

Now I can move on to Step #2, which is selecting the file type. Specifically, there are 3 file types that I want: (1) Main Audio Tracks, (2) Dialogue Tracks, and (3) Lesson Notes PDFs. However, I want to download these separately, so I will need to do this one at a time. Let's start with the Main Audio Tracks:

### Step #2

Select the related file types you want to receive

- All Audio
- Main Audio Track 
- Bonus Audio Track
- Dialog Track
- Review Track

Now I can move on to Step #3, where I will give the custom feed a name. Rather than be creative, I'm going to call it exactly what it is:

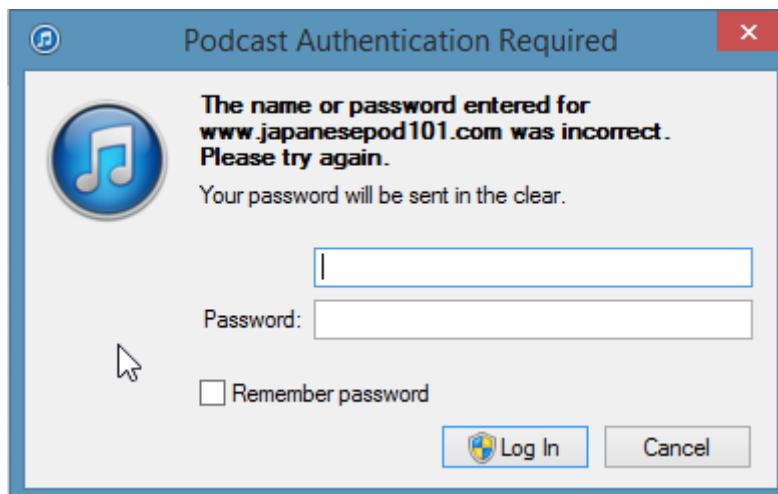
**Step #3**

Enter a unique name for your My Feed: (Required)  
Lower Intermediate Season 01 Main Audio Tracks

For iTunes, simply click on the link below (be sure to have iTunes installed).  
[http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium\\_feed/custom\\_02\\_4096\\_Lowe](http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium_feed/custom_02_4096_Lowe)

For other podcast aggregators such as Juice, copy and paste the link below.  
[http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium\\_feed/custom\\_02\\_4096\\_Lowe](http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium_feed/custom_02_4096_Lowe)

As I type this unique name, a custom feed link will be automatically generated. I can then click on that link, which will open up iTunes, my most hated computer program in the world. If and when iTunes opens, it will tell me to enter my JapanesePod101 login credentials in order to access this podcast:



After failing to login 600 times, then realizing that I'm using the wrong password, I manage to authenticate this business, and the lessons start downloading:



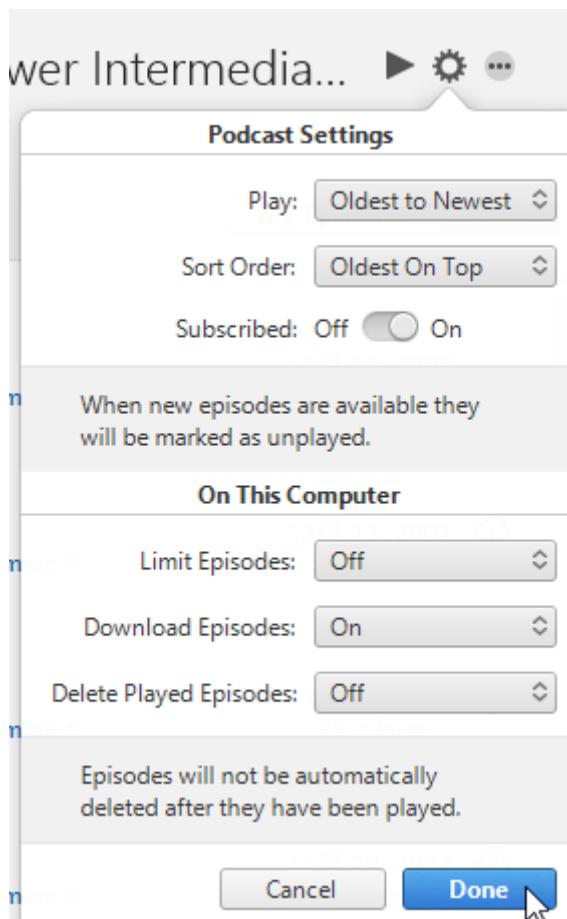
JapanesePod101.com | My Feed - Lower Intermediate... ▶ ⚙ ...

JapanesePod101.com  
Updated today at 8:00  
1 unplayed episode

My Episodes Feed

- Lower Intermediate Lesson #55 - Taking a Sick Day - Audio  
Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#) 12月 20, 2007 19 minutes ⬇
- Lower Intermediate Lesson #54 - Quitters - Audio  
Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#) 12月 13, 2007 16 minutes ⬇
- Lower Intermediate Lesson #53 - Supermarket Superman - Audio  
Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#) 12月 6, 2007 18 minutes ⬇
- Lower Intermediate Lesson #52 - Haircut Appointment 2 - Audio  
Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#) 11月 29, 2007 16 minutes ⬇
- Lower Intermediate Lesson #51 - Haircut Appointment 1 - Audio  
Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#) 11月 22, 2007 15 minutes ⬇

Let's alter the setting of this podcast for a minute, though. I want the lessons to be sorted and played from Oldest to Newest:



Next, I select one episode, then I type “Ctrl + A” to select all episodes:

Then I right-click and select “Download Podcast Episode:”

Lower Intermediate Lesson #54 - Quitters - Audio

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)

Lower Intermediate Lesson #53 - Supermarket Superman - Audio

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)

Lower Intermediate Lesson #52 - Haircut Appointment 2 - Audio

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)

Lower Intermediate Lesson #51 - Haircut Appointment 1 - Audio

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)

The episodes will start downloading one at a time, indicating by the little circle to the left of them:

- Lower Intermediate Lesson #52 - Haircut Appointment 2 - Audio
 

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)
- Lower Intermediate Lesson #51 - Haircut Appointment 1 - Audio
 

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)
- Lower Intermediate Lesson #50 - K-1 Grand Prix 2 - Audio
 

Learn Japanese with JapanesePod101!  
Don't forget to stop by JapanesePod101.com for more great Japanese Language Le... [more ▾](#)

Sweet! While those are downloading, I'm going to go back and download the Dialogue Tracks and the Lesson PDFs.

**Note:** I recently realized that it's also possible to simply right-click the podcast in the left column and select "Download all episodes." None of that "Ctrl + A" business.

### *Step #3 – Download the dialogue tracks for that level and season.*

To download the dialogue tracks, we're following the same exact process described above:

#### Step #1

Select the types of lessons you want to receive

- Lower Beginner
- Lower Beginner Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 1 
- Lower Intermediate Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 3
- Lower Intermediate Season 4
- Lower Intermediate Season 5
- Lower Intermediate Season 6
- Must-Know Japanese Holiday Words
- 

## Step #2

Select the related file types you want to receive

- All Audio
- Main Audio Track
- Bonus Audio Track
- Dialog Track 
- Review Track

## Step #3

Enter a unique name for your My Feed: (Required)

Lower Intermediate Season 01 Dialogue Tracks

For iTunes, simply click on the link below (be sure to have iTunes installed).

[http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium\\_feed/custom\\_0256\\_4096\\_Lo](http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium_feed/custom_0256_4096_Lo)

For other podcast aggregators such as Juice, copy and paste the link below.

[http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium\\_feed/custom\\_0256\\_4096\\_Lo](http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium_feed/custom_0256_4096_Lo)

This time, that iTunes link above will take me to a separate feed for Dialogue Tracks.

Step #4 – Download (& Print) the PDFs for that level and season.

### Step #1

Select the types of lessons you want to receive

- Lower Beginner
- Lower Beginner Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 1 
- Lower Intermediate Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 3
- Lower Intermediate Season 4
- Lower Intermediate Season 5
- Lower Intermediate Season 6
- Must-Know Japanese Holiday Words
- [View All Lessons](#)

### Step #2

Select the related file types you want to receive

- All Audio
  - Main Audio Track
  - Bonus Audio Track
  - Dialog Track
  - Review Track
  - Combo Track
  - Other Audio (Counters, Combo, etc)
- All PDF Material
  - Lesson Notes PDF 
  - Kanji Close-Up PDF
- All Video
  - Video
  - Video Vocab

### Step #3

Enter a unique name for your My Feed: (Required)

Lower Intermediate Season 01 Lesson Notes PDFs

For iTunes, simply click on the link below (be sure to have iTunes installed).

[http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium\\_feed/custom\\_0256\\_4096\\_Lo](http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium_feed/custom_0256_4096_Lo)

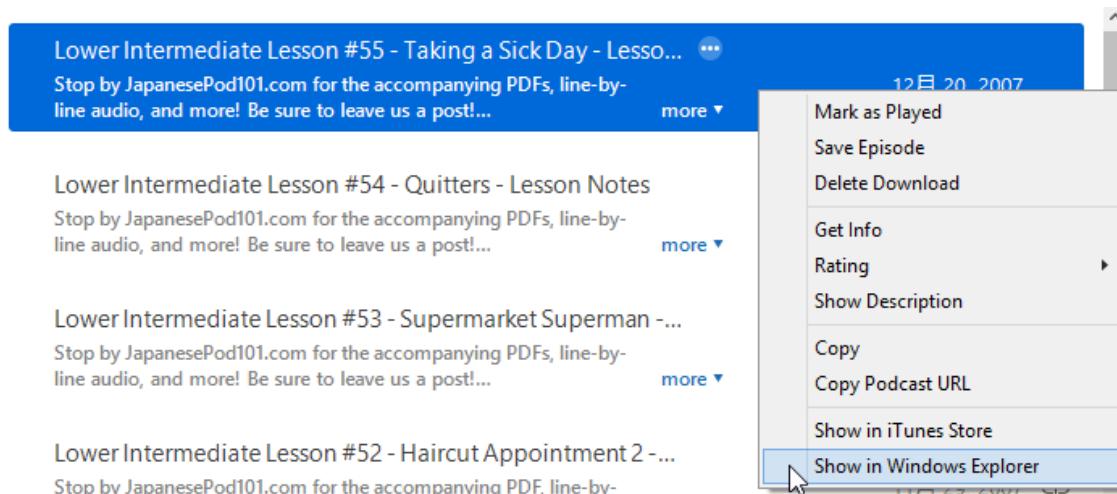
For other podcast aggregators such as Juice, copy and paste the link below.

[http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium\\_feed/custom\\_0256\\_4096\\_Lo](http://www.japanesepod101.com/premium_feed/custom_0256_4096_Lo)

After I click that link above, the PDF file will also get downloaded to iTunes. So, I'll have three different feeds in my iTunes library:

-  JapanesePod101.com | My Feed - Lower Intermediate Season 01 Lesson Notes PDFs  
12月 20, 2007
-  JapanesePod101.com | My Feed - Lower Intermediate Season 01 Dialogue Tracks 1  
12月 20, 2007
-  JapanesePod101.com | My Feed - Lower Intermediate Season 01 Main Audio Tracks 55  
12月 20, 2007

You can sync all of these to your device(s), and they'll appear like any other podcast. Personally, though, I don't really like looking at Lesson Notes on my phone or iPad. When I was really serious about studying Japanese, I always printed them, instead. To do this I can right-click on the lesson notes and select "Show in Windows Explorer:"



(If you have a mac, I have no idea how you're supposed to do this.)

This will take me to the messed-up location where iTunes keeps all of my media, and from there I can move them to a more accessible location and/or print them:



The screenshot shows the iTunes library with a list of episodes. The episodes are arranged in a grid with 4 columns. The first column contains episode 1 through 8, the second column contains episode 9 through 16, the third column contains episode 17 through 24, and the fourth column contains episode 25 through 32. The episodes are titled: Lower Intermediate Lesson #1 - Scary, Lower Intermediate Lesson #2 - Inten, Lower Intermediate Lesson #3 - Looks, Lower Intermediate Lesson #4 - Nobod, Lower Intermediate Lesson #5 - Secon, Lower Intermediate Lesson #6 - Shini, Lower Intermediate Lesson #7 - Bikku, Lower Intermediate Lesson #8 - House, Lower Intermediate Lesson #23 - Reun, Lower Intermediate Lesson #24 - Reun, Lower Intermediate Lesson #27 - My S, Lower Intermediate Lesson #28 - How, Lower Intermediate Lesson #30 - Dinn, Lower Intermediate Lesson #31 - Hair, Lower Intermediate Lesson #32 - Poli, Lower Intermediate Lesson #33 - Spor, Lower Intermediate Lesson #46 - Moth, Lower Intermediate Lesson #47 - Hot, Lower Intermediate Lesson #48 - Pael, Lower Intermediate Lesson #49 - K-1, Lower Intermediate Lesson #50 - K-1, Lower Intermediate Lesson #51 - Hair, Lower Intermediate Lesson #52 - Hair, and Lower Intermediate Lesson #53 - Supe.

---

*Step #5 – Listen to the entire season.*

---

Finally! Once I get those lessons onto my listening device of choice, it's time to listen, listen, listen.

You can listen like a really good student, reading along in the lesson notes before, during, and after each episode and making rad flashcards in your Anki deck.

Or you can be like me and take my lazier approach, just listening to them whenever you have free time, partly for structured language exposure, which is productive, and partly to get excited about Japanese, which is motivating.

---

*Step #6 – Listen to all of the dialogue tracks.*

---

I like to use the dialogue tracks for review. It helps me to gauge how much I've learned and which lessons I need to go back and look at again. If I'm not sure what lessons to go back and look at again, I...

---

*Step #7 – Listen to the entire season again at 2X speed.*

---

As far as I know, most players these days have an option to speed up podcast audio to 2X speed (or slow it down, if you'd like). I love listening to lessons at 2X speed for two different reasons:

1. It's not that difficult to understand, actually. For some reason it's not even that much more difficult than normal speed.
2. It forces me to really focus on the audio. When I'm just chilling at 1X speed, it's easy to get distracted and stop paying attention completely, but this rarely happens to me when I'm listening at double speed.

---

*Step #8 – Move on to the next season (but keep the dialogue tracks).*

---

Once you've listened to the full season a few times, maybe reading through the lesson notes and making flashcards along the way, you'll probably start to feel pretty confident about the lesson content. When this happens, feel free to move up to the next season.

Following the example we've been looking at so far, this would mean moving up to Lower Intermediate Season 02:

## Step #1

Select the types of lessons you want to receive

- Lower Beginner
- Lower Beginner Season 2
- Lower Intermediate Season 1
- Lower Intermediate Season 2 
- Lower Intermediate Season 3
- Lower Intermediate Season 4
- Lower Intermediate Season 5
- Lower Intermediate Season 6
- Must-Know Japanese Holiday Words
- Newbie Season 1

When I do this, I would probably delete Season 01 Main Audio Tracks from my devices, **but I would keep the dialogue tracks**, because it's a super time-effective way to review what I've learned so far. Using dialogue tracks, I could probably review around 30 lessons *per hour*. Pretty fast, if you ask me.

*Step #9 – Repeat steps #1-8 for each season in your level.*

In this case, I would do everything I have described so far in Steps #1-8 for

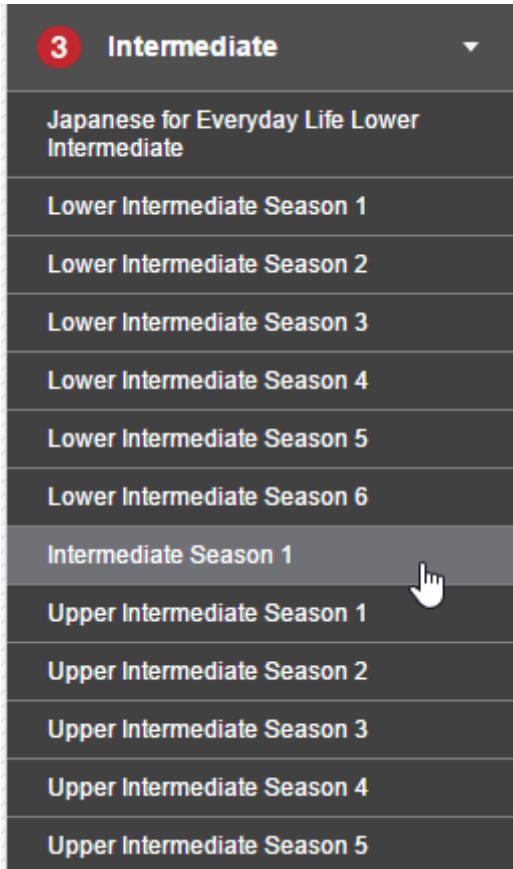
- ❖ Lower Intermediate Season 1
- ❖ Lower Intermediate Season 2
- ❖ Lower Intermediate Season 3
- ❖ Lower Intermediate Season 4
- ❖ Lower Intermediate Season 5
- ❖ Lower Intermediate Season 6

Once I feel like I have all of the Lower Intermediate Lessons figured out without any major problems, then I can...

*Step #10 – Move up to the next level (but keep the dialogue tracks).*

---

In this particular example, this means that I would move up to Intermediate Level:



I would complete the season(s) for that level, then I would move up to Upper Intermediate, and I'd complete each of those seasons one at a time. In other words, I would...

*Step #11 – Repeat steps #1-10 for every single level.*

---

And at the end of it all, I will have learned a ton of Japanese.

It's a lot of fun to look at all of those seasons and levels and to visualize all the awesome learning that you're going to partake in. However, don't forget that **this learning process will take a lot of time and effort**. You won't be jumping up levels every week, because there is a lot of solid content in each level.

Don't rush. Just take your time and enjoy yourself. Slow and steady wins the race, baby.

### *Phase #3 Assignment*

1. Remove barriers to listening practice.
2. Put audio lessons onto your phone, mp3 player, PC, Xbox, CDs—Everywhere!
3. Study at least 1 Japanese audio lesson every day.
  - [JapanesePod101](#) System:
    - ① Pick a level and season.
    - ② Download the full audio for that level and season.
    - ③ Download the dialogue tracks for that level and season.
    - ④ Download (& Print) the PDFs for that level and season.
    - ⑤ Listen to the entire season.
    - ⑥ Listen to all of the dialogue tracks.
    - ⑦ Listen to the entire season again at 2X speed.
    - ⑧ Move on to the next season (but keep the dialogue tracks).
    - ⑨ Repeat steps #1-8 for each season in your level.
    - ⑩ Move up to the next level (but keep the dialogue tracks).
    - ⑪ Repeat steps #1-10 for every single level.

And that's our Daily Chain Item #2—a systematic approach to studying (at least one) audio lesson(s) per day. One lesson only takes like 15-20 minutes, and if you've removed all of the barriers to listening and start forming habits, then it shouldn't be too much of a problem. So listen to your one lesson and get that Blue X on your calendar.

### *Video Lessons*

I thought that I should also include a short note about video lessons. To be entirely honest, I don't really listen to video lessons, but that doesn't make them any less useful or awesome.

For example, you could download some video lessons following the same steps described above, then watch them while you eat lunch every day. For some reason I like watching videos while I eat; I have no idea why.

I'm not the biggest fan of JapanesePod101's video lessons, although they do seem to be ramping up their video production a bit. If you're really into video learning, I'd probably

go with [FluentU Japanese](#). It's a paid service, which is a bummer, but it's a pretty cool online video platform. I wrote about it [in this article](#).

Another option would be to take a systematic approach to studying anime, which I will look at towards the end of this guide.

## Chain Item #3 – Grammar & Speaking Practice

---



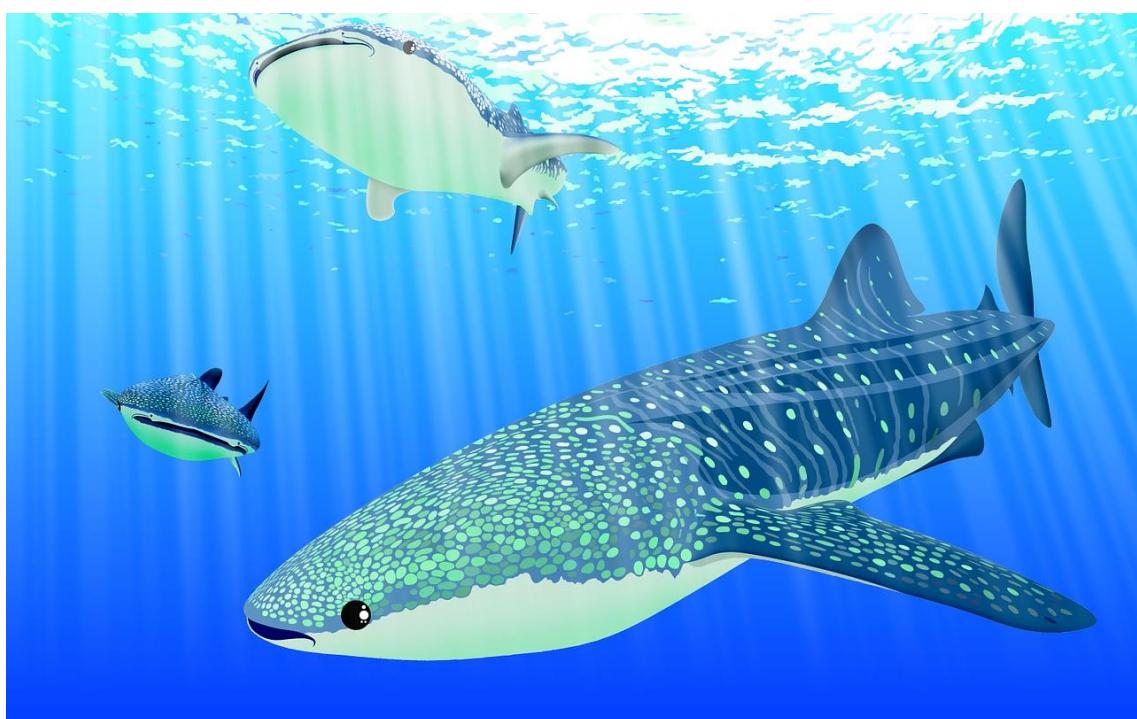
In old versions of this guide, Chain Item #3 was just “Grammar.” However, the better I get at Japanese, the more I appreciate the value of speaking practice in the beginner stages of learning. Part of this appreciation came from the influence of sites like [FluentIn3Months.com](#), which put a huge emphasis on speaking, and part of this appreciation came from seeing the disparity in the Japanese level of my non-Japanese friends based on their exposure to lessons and structured speaking practice.

Also, I think that it's worth noting that the lack of speaking practice in English, among other things, has done extensive damage to the general English competency throughout Japan. Some people study and study and study, but they still can't form sentences. Structurally speaking, Japanese and English are quite different. As a result, if you're still thinking in your native language when you try to form sentences, then it will take a long, long time. So maybe you can write a nice journal entry, but you can't get through your self-introduction without stumbling over your words. This was exactly the problem that I had a few years ago, when I moved to Japan with a lot of Japanese in head, but no

experience getting it out of my mouth. Yeah, it was pretty easy to deal with this problem, because of the mountain of information I'd piled up in my brain, but it still felt like quite a clunky transition, and it's a transition that I wouldn't have had to make if I'd simply practiced speaking in a structured environment consistently from beginner level on up.

You want to be able to converse in Japanese, right? Well, people who practice conversing are the ones that are good at conversing, which means that we have little choice but to...

### *Dive into Speaking*



I've always been an introvert. A lot of people find this hard to believe, because I like to go out with friends, move from place to place, and meet as many new people as possible. At the end of the day, though, my energy source is alone time, not time spent with other people.

I used to be pretty shy, too, especially when it came to speaking a language that I wasn't comfortable in. Add to this that I have a pretty bad habit of being broke, spending all my money on extra-long trips that, realistically speaking, I can't afford. This all adds up to bad news for speaking practice:

Introverted + Shy About Imperfect Japanese + No Money for Lessons

=

Lack of speaking ability

Looking at that equation, I can totally see why I neglected my speaking practice for so long when I was first diving into Japanese. At the same time, I see how I was just making excuses so that I could ignore the problem.

Speaking in a new language is uncomfortable—you feel stupid; you sound stupid; you can't express yourself the way you want to; your brain gets tired; people around you don't know what to say to you. But we can't let these things come between us and our desire to speak this language fluently.

I hope that the content in this guide will be enough to give you the courage, confidence, and motivation to start speaking this language even if you're still at a beginner stage. As such, I'd like to share some small mindset tweaks that have helped me personally get over my hesitation to dive into structured speaking practice.

#### *Advice I give myself when I struggle with speaking Japanese.*

---

**Learn to laugh at yourself.** Frankly, I have no idea how anyone makes it past the beginning stages of learning a language without having the ability to laugh at themselves when they make stupid, embarrassing mistakes. There have been so many times when I made a mistake—probably the same mistake I've already made 8,000 times—and I found myself facing two options: (1) get angry at myself, or (2) laugh at myself. And I've found that, with a little bit of effort, two is always a feasible option. We have to make mistakes in order to improve. If we fear mistakes, then we also fear improving.

**Flip your concept of inferiority around other students of Japanese.** I think that the hardest thing to do is to speak a foreign language around other students of the language that are far better than you. This is my defense mechanism in such situations: First, think about how you feel when you're around somebody who's much better than you at [insert foreign language]. Does it make you feel good? Probably not. It makes you feel embarrassed and inferior. On the other hand, think about how you feel when you're

around somebody who's not as good as you at [insert anything]. How does that make you feel? Proud of yourself? Confident? Finally, **how do you want the people around you to feel?** Most likely, you want to make them feel happy, proud of themselves, confident. And you can't do that by being perfect. So don't try to be perfect. *Being bad at something is an awesome opportunity to lift up the people around you, to make them feel awesome.* If I'm bad at something, there's no need for me to feel bad about being bad. Instead, I can feel good about making people feel good that I'm not as good as them.

**Flip your concept of inferiority around native Japanese speakers.** It's easy to be embarrassed that your Japanese is imperfect and full of mistakes, but at the same time the very fact that you are speaking Japanese with a native speaker means that they are equally to blame for the inability to communicate. I used to tell this to my Japanese students of English all the time when they told me about how they're so embarrassed about their English skills. I told them that the very fact that the conversation must take place in English means that the person you're talking to is more to blame for this inability to communicate. The same goes for speaking Japanese with Japanese people who are unable or unwilling to speak English. You win, because you're the one making the effort. (This only works for Japanese people who don't speak English. It doesn't address the entirely opposite problem of Japanese people insisting on speaking English, even when your Japanese is much better than their English.)

**Stop caring about who's better than who.** It doesn't even matter in the first place. You can't make learning Japanese into a competition, because you will lose every time. You will lose every time, because the opponent in your head doesn't even exist—it's some all-powerful, native-speaker-level ninja boss that you'll never meet. If you meet someone who's better than you, congratulate them and ask them for advice. If you meet someone who's worse than you, see if you can help them improve (if they want help, that is).

**The only embarrassing thing is your reaction.** This one I originally learned from [this post about making mistakes on FluentIn3Months](#). If you totally embrace your mistakes (for example, by laughing at yourself), then no one feels uncomfortable... which means that there is nothing to be embarrassed about. Sweet!

**You can afford it.** Not having money is probably my all-time favorite excuse for not

taking language lessons. Only, Japanese speaking practice is free if you really want it to be free. There are so many Japanese students of English on sites like [italki](#) or [MyLanguageExchange](#) that are dying to have serious, productive language exchanges. It's easy. You both buy textbooks, and then you take turns. Give 30 minutes of structured English practice. Get 30 minutes of structured Japanese practice. Even if you pay for lessons, most of them are under \$20, and a lot of them are even under \$10. **When I'm really 100% honest with myself, not practicing speaking has always been about my lack of effort.** It's pretty hard for me to convince that introvert brain of mine that taking a Japanese lesson is more important than making 30 new flashcards. I'm getting better, but, yeah... it's a work in progress.

**Have fun!** First and foremost, learning languages is about connecting with other people. We can learn, build relationships, find love, mysteries, and lifelong friendships. Language only has meaning because it connects us to real life—that is, life with other people. It's not about getting your grammar perfect or memorizing a million vocab words. Because at the end of the day, things like that are nothing more than tools for us to have a deeper and more fulfilling interaction with the world around us. So have fun. Don't worry about mistakes. Don't worry about not having enough money for a proper lesson. Don't worry about stumbling through a disaster of a conversation. Worry about putting a smile on someone's face. Worry about hearing something new from a person who, without your language-learning efforts, you never would have been able to connect with at all. Find out about their dreams and fears and knowledge and experiences. **At its core, learning a language is a deeply fulfilling and deeply entertaining adventure.** So let's take it for what it is.

Whatever your mental block, do whatever you need to do to get past it and commit to start practice speaking in a safe, comforting, productive environment. I'll show you how to create that environment right now...

### *Schedule a Lesson (or Language Exchange)*

---

I think that the most important thing about Phase #3, Chain Item #3 is getting started. We can talk about your regular quotas for speaking and/or grammar practice later. More importantly, **get started by taking that leap.**

I recommend booking a lesson one week in advance, then scrambling to prepare for it.

***Phase #3 Assignment, Chain Item #3***

1. On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.

To give an example, I'll walk you through booking a lesson on [italki](#) or [Cafetalk](#), then preparing in the days that lead up to it.

**[1. Decide on Lesson Content](#)**

The first thing you'll need to do is to decide what type of lessons you want to take. In deciding this, I think it's a good idea to go back and look at the [grammar resources in Phase #1](#). Looking at the list of different grammar resources, you'll probably notice that some of them are more suited for classroom study than others.

For example, although I think Tae Kim's Grammar Guide has the best explanation for a beginning student of Japanese grammar, it's better suited for self-study. Also, while JapanesePod101 probably has the most extensive amount of resources for grammar study, all of those are tied to a lesson that your teacher probably won't have access to.

If I were a beginner, and I were planning to schedule a Japanese lesson, I would almost certainly take a lesson that focuses on either the Genki series or the Minna no Nihongo series. There are two reasons for this: (1) They're both designed for classroom study and (2) All Japanese teachers should be familiar with and experienced at teaching at least one of the two.

**[Find a Teacher for That Content](#)**

For example, let's imagine that I'm an absolute beginner, and I want to go through the entire Genki series. If I go on [Cafetalk](#), I can search for "Genki" in the search bar, and there are lessons tailored for that series. From [the homepage](#), I go to Lessons → Languages:

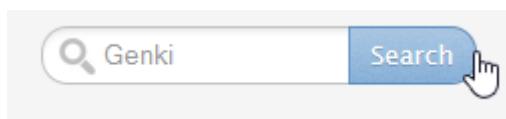


Why Cafetalk? | Lessons | Tutors | Featured Specials



If I'm still not sure about what lesson I want to take, I can browse Japanese lessons by using the "Select Language" dropdown, or I can use the search bar on the right, which is what I'm going to do now:

I search for "Genki:"



This brings up a handful of (quite affordable) *Genki*-based lessons by Japanese teachers:



### Japanese for Beginners (50 min)

For people who are just getting started with Japanese.

Japanese | 50 Mins | \$1,500 Pts

Has Trial: 15 min 0 Pts | Skype Lesson | Teacher\_Sae

[Details→](#)



### Japanese Grammar for Beginners

Let's start Japanese! From reading Hiragana to JLPT 5

Japanese | 50 Mins | \$1,000 Pts

Has Trial: 20 min 200 Pts | Skype Lesson | mumusuke

[Details→](#)



### Let's start learning Japanese:D

This class is a longer version of 'Lets study Japanese'. The class length is 50mi...

Japanese | 50 Mins | \$1,500 Pts

Has Trial: 10 min 0 Pts | Skype Lesson | Eribo

[Details→](#)

Looking at some of those, I see that a number of these teachers also offer the same course for the *Minna no Nihongo* series. Sweet!

If I'd rather use [italki](#), I can do pretty much the same thing on their website:



The screenshot shows the italki.com homepage. At the top, there is a logo with a stylized 'i' and 'alki' in pink, followed by '.com'. To the right of the logo is a dropdown menu for 'English'. Below the logo is a navigation bar with four tabs: 'Home' (highlighted in pink), 'Professional Lessons', 'Informal Tutoring', and 'Instant Tutoring'. A cursor icon is pointing at the 'Informal Tutoring' tab.

I can choose either professional lessons or informal tutoring, then I can browse through the various teachers and request a lesson with whoever seems cool to me. The one bummer about [italki](#) is that their site is more teacher-based, whereas [Cafetalk](#) is more lesson-based. So it's easy to find which teachers are using the resources I want on [Cafetalk](#). However, I'd be surprised if any teacher wasn't using at least one of the textbooks described so far.

Depending on your level of Japanese, you may also want to consider the teacher's level of English, as it might be useful to have someone that can explain difficult concepts to you

in English. Also, it's probably just less scary overall for a beginner. Luckily, both of these sites list the language level of teachers.

If your Japanese is lower-intermediate or above, you probably don't need to use English in your lessons, and you'd also have a bit more freedom in choosing lessons, as a lot of them have cool "Free Talk" options and whatnot.

### Contact & Schedule

There are a lot of other factors that can go into choosing a language teacher. If you look at [this article on BrazilianGringo.com](#), you can see how some people put a lot of thought into choosing a teacher. Knowing myself, though, if I put too much thought into it, I'd probably spend around 16 years "choosing a teacher," which is another way of saying "putting off my lessons." So personally **I'd aim to choose my teacher, contact them, and request a lesson all within 5-15 minutes.** We're trying to "dive into lessons," after all, right? Then, if my teacher sucked, I'd just take a different one the second time. Good language-learners are like good entrepreneurs—they make mistakes fast, learn from them, then improve slightly for Round #2, slowly working their way up to Round #31,987, when language-business nirvana is attained and all is good in the world.

### *Plow through the Caveman Course*

---

If you're following the guide exactly, it will be Phase #3, Day #1 when you schedule a lesson for Phase #3, Day #7. This gives you 1 week to prepare for your first lesson, and if you're a true beginner of Japanese, then the moment you schedule that lesson, you might panic, thinking, "I don't know any Japanese! What have I done?!"

Don't worry. I got you.

Towards the end of this guide, there is a section called the "Caveman Conversation Course." The entire purpose of this guide is to prepare you during Phase #1 Days #1-7. It's not a comprehensive grammar guide. If you want one of those, you should go back to grammar resources in Phase #1. Instead, we just need to get you set up with the bare minimum for diving into your first Japanese lesson.

### **Phase #3 Assignment, Chain Item #3**

1. On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.
2. On Day #1-7 of Phase #3, plow through the Caveman Conversation Course.

Specifically, the Caveman Conversation Course Covers:

- ❖ Super basic greetings.
- ❖ In-lesson survival phrases:
  - “How do I say...?”
  - “What does X mean?”
  - “Please slow down.”
  - “One more time, please.”

Actually, it includes a bit more than that, but those are the first sections, and they’re the only thing you need to read to prepare for your first lesson. To be completely honest, you don’t really have to prepare at all for your first lesson, because that’s your teacher’s problem, but you’ll probably have a much better experience if you do...

### ***Preparing for Your First Lesson***

Let’s keep following with the *Genki* lesson above. If I were an absolute beginner, and I were preparing for a lesson that follows the *Genki* textbook, this is what I would do...

#### **1. Read through the whole lesson one time.**

No notes. No memorizing. I would just relax on the couch and read every word in the lesson.

#### **2. Read through the lesson again, making Anki flashcards for new vocabulary and grammar concepts.**

This time around I would type all of the sentences (with new vocabulary words) that I wanted to memorize into my personal vocabulary deck on Anki. In effect, I would be memorizing everything in my text book one step at a time.

#### **3. Read through the lesson a third time, doing all of the exercises by myself.**

This is basically a chance for me to walk through my lesson as if I were with my teacher.

I could make sentences when prompted to do so, fill in blank lines, all that good stuff.

#### [4. Do the workbook assignment that accompanies my lesson.](#)

Both Minna no Nihongo and the Genki series have workbooks that accompany them. So for that extra bit of practice, it's not a bad idea to go through them on your own. If you do buy the workbooks, be sure to get the Answer Key that goes along with them. That way you don't need to have your teacher check your answers. You can just check your own answers and make notes about questions that you have for your teacher.

#### [5. Take the lesson with a teacher!](#)

Here I would meet with my teacher, and I'd pretty much let them run the show. I'm guessing that we'd just walk through each of the exercises and try to get as much speaking practice as possible. I should only need to hear minimal explanations, because I've already studied in advance, and I wouldn't be wasting any of the time that I'm paying for with the teacher by doing the written exercises. All of this would be prepared for in advance, meaning that I maximize my speaking practice time.

While I take the lesson, I'd use a free program [like this one](#) to automatically record the audio of the conversation. Then later, I could put that audio onto a listening device and use it for review and to check my pronunciation (assuming that I can bear to listen to a recording of my own voice).

Before the lesson, I would let the teacher know that I want them to type down my mistakes when possible. Most lessons will be done via Skype, and it's quite easy to type corrections into the chat box. I do it when teaching English all the time. However, I would let my teacher know that I want them to **write all corrections using full Japanese with kanji**. Most teachers will only use hiragana with beginner students. Or, worse, they'll use some hideous form of Romanization that I can't read at all. Since the corrections that the teacher writes in the chat box will later be added to my personal vocabulary deck on Anki, I want them to have the full kanji. If they don't, I will have to go find it myself (either when I make the cards or later when my Japanese improves), which means more work in the future for me, which means wasted time.

## 6. Review and schedule the next lesson.

After the lesson, I'd make Anki flashcards for appropriate items, listen to the audio track for review, and schedule another meeting with my teacher (or a different teacher if my first one was horrible). I could keep repeating Steps #1-5 until I got through every lesson in every book of my grammar series, thus bringing my Japanese level up to Intermediate. I could then find a higher-level study resource that appeals to me and continue in a similar fashion.

### *Bomb Your First Conversation*

Looking at that list of how I'd prepare for a lesson in an ideal world, it might seem a little bit overwhelming to take Japanese lessons. The thing is, though, all of that stuff is optional. If you have a full-time job and kids and sports and whatever else and no time to be sitting around preparing for lessons all day, then don't worry about it. The only important thing is that you're doing *something* in a structured manner over a long period of time.

Don't stress yourself out. Lessons should be fun. Enjoy yourself. So bomb your first conversation. Bomb your second conversation. Who cares? Just laugh at yourself for every mistake you make, big or small. The effort is all that matters.

#### *Phase #3 Assignment, Chain Item #3*

1. On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.
2. On Day #1-7 of Phase #3, plow through the Caveman Conversation Course.
3. On Day #7, take your first (online) Japanese lesson.

### *One Lesson per Week*

Really, this is up to you. But I'm recommending at least one lesson per week. If you have extra time, you can take two or more lessons. Or you could use that extra time to prepare for lessons or to do any of the stuff that I've talked about in this guide.

A day you take a lesson is a day you get a Blue X on your calendar for "Grammar/Speaking."

### *Phase #3 Assignment, Chain Item #3 – Dive into Speaking*

1. On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.
2. On Day #1-7 of Phase #3, plow through the Caveman Conversation Course.
3. On Day #7, take your first (online) Japanese lesson.
4. Take at least one lesson per week, every week.

### *Ease into Studying*

Although I recommend diving into speaking, I think that it's totally fine to ease into studying grammar. That's why the Daily Chain requirement for grammar is super easy: **Study for at least one minute per day.**

### *One Minute per Day*

One minute per day? Yeah. And if you take a lesson that day, then you don't need to study grammar at all.

Realistically, no, **studying only one minute per day is not going to teach you much Japanese at all.** But that's just the minimum. You have to open up your grammar resource of choice and actually focus on it for a whole sixty seconds. Just by doing that, you'll find that it's not always too hard to keep studying that grammar resource for another 1, 2, 10, 75 minutes!

Phase #3's Daily Chain Items are already asking a lot of you. You're trying to study a bunch of flashcards, and listen to a full audio lesson every day, in addition to showing up for a face-to-face Japanese lesson every week. That's a lot of work! And I think saying something unrealistic like, "Study grammar 1 hour per day!" is totally ridiculous, and an unrealistic goal has the potential to completely sabotage your studies, because you start to feel like you're failing when you don't achieve that goal, and this can lead to you quitting your studies completely.

Yeah, if you have time, then pore over some of those JapanesePod101 PDFs, read Tae Kim's awesome grammar guide for hours on end, prepare for your weekly lesson the way I described earlier by teaching yourself pretty much the whole thing.

But on the days that you don't have the time, the energy, or the motivation to go above and beyond, just study one minute. One minute—that's all it takes for you to get that Blue X on your calendar. You can handle that, yeah?

*Phase #3, Chain Item #3 – Speaking & Grammar: Daily & Weekly Routine*

1. Take at least 1 lesson per week.
2. Study grammar at least 1 minute per day.

## The Real Fluency Foundation

I said that the ultimate premise of Phase #3 is building a Japanese fluency foundation. A nice solid rock that you can easily build upon. You learn how to read and pronounce Japanese characters in Phase #2. Then, in Phase #3, you lay the groundwork for an accelerated progression towards high-level proficiency by equipping yourself with fundamental Japanese grammar and vocabulary, coupled with experience forming sentences of your own.

If you make it to the end of Phase #3 with Blue X's for every day on your calendar, which is a huge feat in itself, then it's probably safe to say that you are fluent in Japanese... depending on your definition of the word fluent.

### *What Is Fluency?*

“Fluent” is one of those words that I used for years... until I actually became “fluent” in a language. I found that the better I got at Japanese, the less understood the real meaning of this word.

Is fluent being able to order at a restaurant? Is fluent being able to ask for directions? Is it JLPT N3? N1? Does it include understanding political documentaries? Does it include being able to comfort your friend after they've lost a loved one?

I have no idea what the word “fluent” means. And if “fluency” is something that you're aiming for, then you're probably going to be disappointed, unless you give it your own specific, personal definition.

When I said “build a foundation for fluency in Japanese,” I really just meant that you will **reach a level where you’ve learned too much to turn back**. I am talking about reaching a level where you are proud of yourself. You will be able to do amazing things in the language that extend far past your initial ability. At the same time, there will still be so many things that you can’t do in Japanese at the end of Phase #3. “Fluency” is a bittersweet feeling.

**A good language-learner is never 100% satisfied.** There will always be other people that are better than you at Japanese. Always. Even if you get better than every other student of Japanese that you’ve ever met, there will still be Japanese people that you’ll never catch up to. I think that while a good language-learner recognizes that there are always areas that can be improved, at the same time he or she must not have a negative mindset about the never-ending quest for improvement.

### *Why Japanese Will Give You Superpowers*

Learning Japanese has changed the way that I see the world in so many ways. Perhaps the thing that I appreciate the most, though, is the confidence that it has given me in all facets of life.

A few months ago, I told a friend I wanted to start learning piano.

“*Did you play as a child?*” he asked.

“*No,*” I said.

“*Then you might not be able to,*” he said bluntly.

I’m pretty sure that I had a conversation just like this when I was a teenager, but I wasn’t talking about learning piano. I was talking about learning Japanese. And the sad thing is, I believed people when they said that Japanese was too difficult. That it was already too late to learn a new language if you didn’t learn it as a child. Back then, I didn’t know people that were teaching themselves languages. I didn’t know of any websites that detail success stories. So when people told me I couldn’t do it, I believed them.

Now, I have a different perspective though. I have realized that **people tell us we can't do things that they believe *themselves* incapable of doing**. I notice things like this so often. I don't think that people do it intentionally. When they say you can't do something, it's because the negative person in their heads is telling them the same thing. But listening to these people is so dangerous. It's tempting to falter when we encounter their lack of faith, because it's hard to have faith in yourself, especially when trying to do something that you're not particularly confident about in the first place.

Japanese can be that thing that you always look back to, though. The time when you *did* do what you said you wanted to do.

That's why, when my friend told me that, I thought, "*I'm pretty sure I can learn piano. I learned Japanese, after all.*" Even after everyone said it was too hard. Even after all the times I told myself it was too hard.

**Learning Japanese taught me the value of sticking to something that's important to me.** And I want you to have that, too, if you don't already.

So I looked at my friend, and I said:

*"If I never quit trying to learn piano, I'll learn it eventually. Maybe in a few months. Maybe in ten years. If I keep practicing, the result is inevitable."*

Just like it was with Japanese. **I quit. And I quit. And I quit. But then, I stuck to it.** The result was inevitable.

My friend gave me a quizzical look. Then, a few seconds later, he nodded his head.

*"Yeah, I guess that's true,"* he said.

Learning Japanese might feel like swimming across an ocean. But you can do it.

**Just keep swimming. You will reach the shore.**

(On a side note, I'm kind of embarrassed to admit that I still haven't tried learning piano. Distractions, whims, whatever—all that stuff I talk about in Mindset Prep of Phase #1. If I really cared about learning piano, though, I would go ahead and do so. If I committed and kept swimming, there's no reason that I wouldn't learn it.)

## Summary

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With that, you've done it! You've reached the end of Phase #3, which is, in fact, the end of your entire first year of studying. Congratulations! You're seriously amazing for even reading this far. Let's take a look at all of the assignments and whatnot that we'll deal with in Phase #3.

## *Phase #3 – Checklist (Week #17 – Week #52)*

**Purpose:** Build a Foundation of Grammar, Vocabulary, and Speaking Skills

**Time to Complete:** 35 Weeks (~8 Months)

### **Daily Study Chain Prep**

- Go online and find a monthly or yearly calendar that you like the look of.
- Print it out.
- Buy or set aside two colored markers: Blue and Red; or Your Favorite Color and Your Most Hated Color; any two colors.
- Start marking (Blue) X's on days that you study all three chain items, (Red) X's the first time you miss one or more chain items, and No X's every time you go two or more days without studying all three chain items (Hint: This should never happen).

### **Daily Chain Item #1 – Flashcards**

- Download the [Blank NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck](#).
- When you encounter new words in your studies, add them to your deck (either manually or using EPWing2Anki).
- Download [the Pre-Loaded NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck](#).

### **Daily Chain Item #2 – Listening Practice**

- Remove barriers to listening practice.
- Put audio lessons onto your phone, mp3 player, PC, Xbox, CDs—Everywhere!

### **Daily Chain Item #3 – Grammar and Speaking Practice**

- On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.
- On Day #1-7 of Phase #3, plow through the Caveman Conversation Course.
- On Day #7, take your first (online) Japanese lesson.
- Schedule your second (online) Japanese lesson.

## Daily Chain Process

There are 3 items in the Daily Study Chain.

- When you do all 3 items, you can put a Blue X on your study chain calendar.
- If you miss one or more items one day, you can only put a Red X on your calendar.
- If you miss one or more items two or more days in a row, you cannot put any X's.

### 1. Flashcards

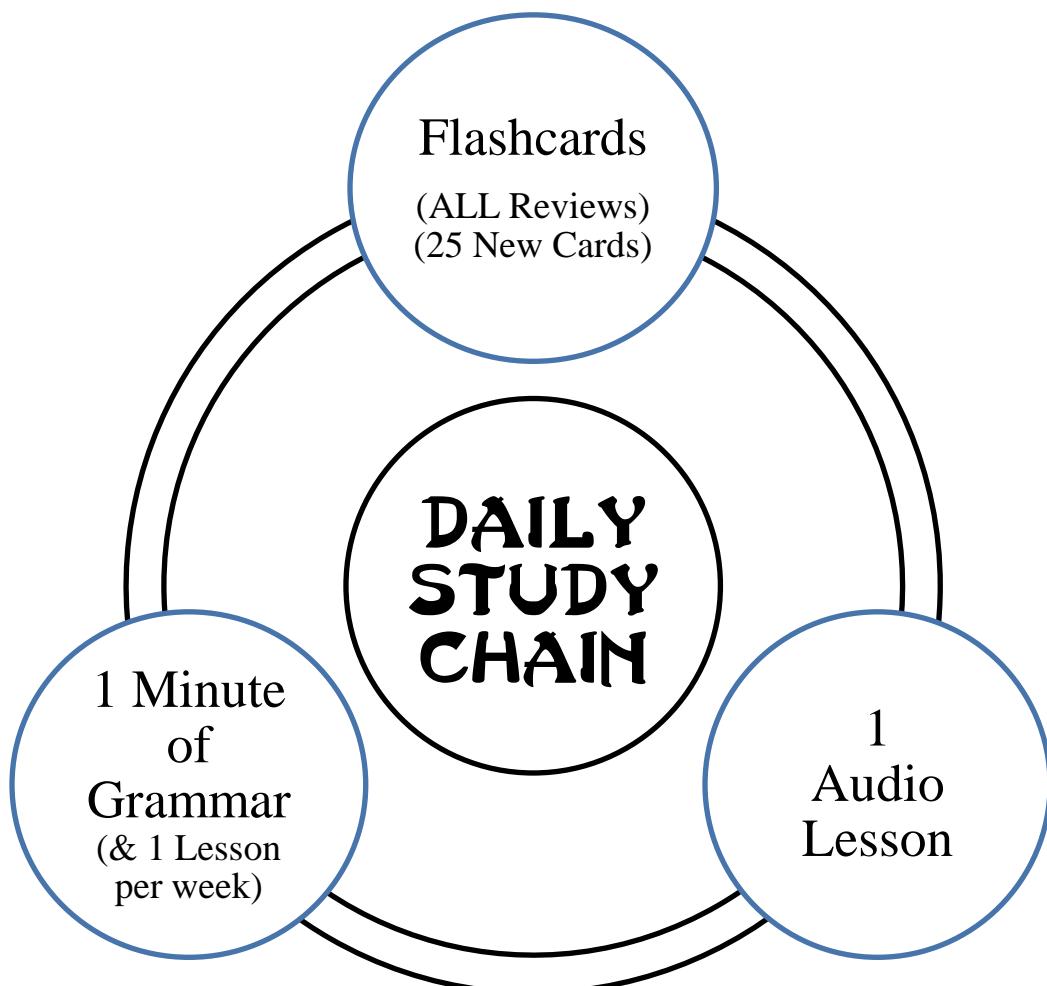
- ✧ Study ALL of your Review Cards every day.
- ✧ Study 25 New Cards every day.

### 2. Listening

- ✧ Listen to at least 1 audio lesson every day.

### 3. Grammar & Speaking

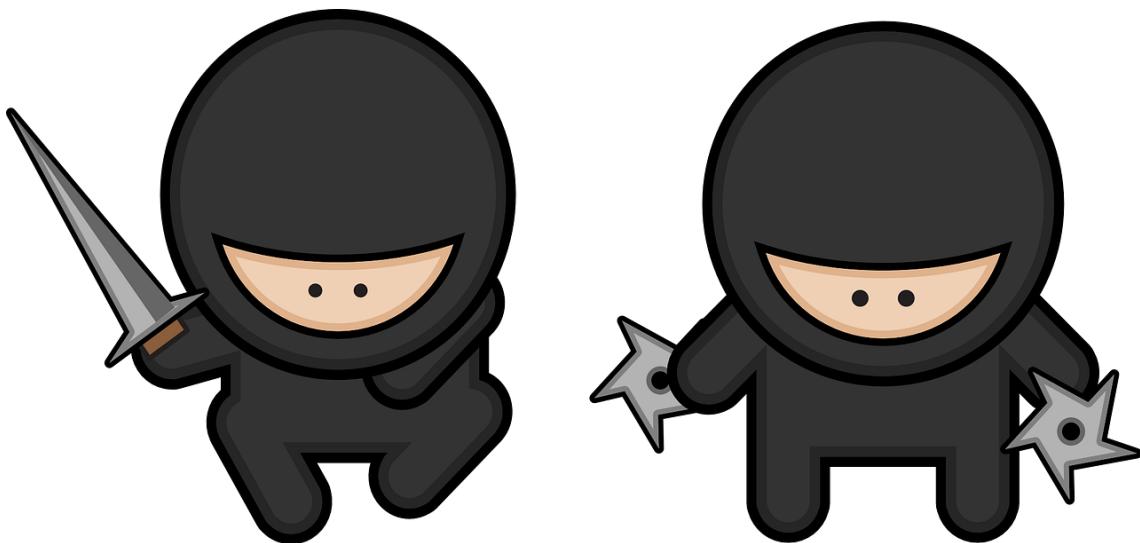
- ✧ Study grammar at least 1 minute per day.
- ✧ Practice speaking (preferably, in lessons) at least once a week.



# PHASE #4 - Go

## JOUZU

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Phase #4 begins at the end of Year #1. Maybe if you hit some speed bumps it will take a little over a year to complete Phases #1-3. Or maybe you're a study master, and you'll get to Phase #4 in 8 months. Whatever the case, reaching Phase #4 is an occasion for celebration. If you've made it this far, then your mind is super-prepped for fluency. You are officially Jouzu.

じょうず  
Jouzu = 上手 = “skilled; good (at)” = 上 (above) + 手 (hand) = upper hand = pro status; shark ninja-esque = something Japanese people will tell you that you are the second you learn to say *Konnichiwa*, but a distinction that you won't feel is deserving until you've done a ridiculous amount of studying.

### Reached Goals

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Although I call this Phase #4, it isn't really a phase at all, because it signifies breaking out of the process described thus far in this guide. Another way to put it is that Phase #4 will

continue for as long as you keep studying Japanese (i.e. forever, hopefully).

To get to Phase #4, you will have to:

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with a wide variety of study tools.
- ✓ Learn how to pronounce Japanese accurately.
- ✓ Learn hiragana.
- ✓ Learn katakana.
- ✓ Learn the meanings of at least 2,136+ kanji.
- ✓ Memorize at least 6,000+ vocabulary flashcards.
- ✓ Listen to at least 245+ audio lessons.
- ✓ Practice speaking in at least 35 Japanese lessons and/or language exchanges.
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with introductory, beginner, and intermediate Japanese grammar (ideally learning everything in every lesson of the *Genki* or *Minna no Nihongo* series, as well as the entirety of Tae Kim's *A Guide to Japanese Grammar*).

If you get through all of that, you're a serious boss. Like, that's amazing!

I suppose you could think of Phase #4 as a kind of reward to yourself, because Phase #4, which from now on I'll just be referring to as "your future studies," is all about focusing on the aspects of Japanese language, culture, and media that you are intrinsically interested in. That is, it's about really having fun with this language.

## Completely Immersing Yourself in Japanese

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I almost put this section in Phase #1, because there are so many Ninja Tools that I want to introduce here. However, I was worried that doing so might distract from the focus of the first three phases: (1) Prepare study tools, (2) Learn reading and pronunciation, (3) Build a fluency foundation. Also, I have found that completely immersing yourself in a target language (especially one like Japanese with so many characters that you might not know) can actually be *discouraging* if you do it too soon. I'm sure that there are a lot of people who disagree with me. Look at [AllJapaneseAlltheTime.com](http://AllJapaneseAlltheTime.com). That's like the entire premise of that site.

Once you get to a point where it's not overwhelming, though, an immersive environment

can serve as a huge study motivator. Once you truly start living with Japanese, it will seep its way into your life, and studying will become second nature. In my case, for example, **my life is now set up in a way that I can't escape Japanese**. Even if I wanted to, I wouldn't be able to get away from Japanese. I have Japanese friends posting in Japanese on Facebook. I get emails from Japanese newsletters. My IP address is set to Japan. I get emails in Japanese for translation work. I get emails in Japanese from low-level English students. The majority of the books on my Kindle and the movies on my iPad are in Japanese. As a result, even doing something that is “relaxing” turns out to be a form of studying. I tried to do stuff like this when I was at a lower level, but it just stressed me out, to be honest. Instead, I eased into it over time, and it was a nice, fluid transition.

As such, you can take advantage of as much or as little of this information as you'd like. If the idea of setting your PC's settings to Japanese stresses you out, then put it off until you get to a higher level. For the meantime, maybe you could just follow a bunch of Japanese pages on Facebook. Your call.

For those who want to create a 100% immersive environment, though, I have quite a long list of ideas for you...

### *Immersing Your Technology in Japanese*

The first step to immersing yourself in Japanese is immersing your technology in Japanese. This is awesome, because it only takes minutes to do. Praise the internet! Also, I read about new and interesting ways to immerse one's digital life in Japanese all the time, meaning that there's always something new and rad that I don't know about, so please feel free to [contact me](#) if you have any ideas that you think I should share with readers.

### *Set Your PC to Japanese*

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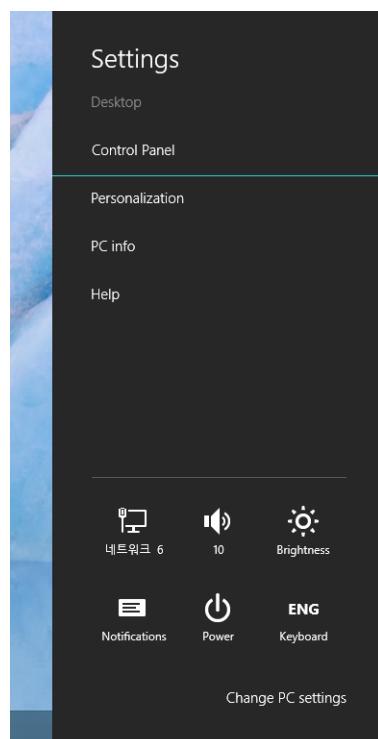
I'm not sure how to do this for a Mac, because I have a Windows PC. Maybe someone who's really good at Mac's could write a guest post on my site about it. Then if we ever meet in person I'll buy you a beer or something. Just think about it, yo.

For Windows, I know, this is a pretty straightforward process. The easiest way is probably just to google something like “change [Windows] interface language.”

In my case (running Windows 8.something), I'll start by going to my Control Panel. One way to get there is to hit "Windows Key + C," and that brings up the interface bar on the right of my screen, and I hit "Settings."



Control Panel is the second option:



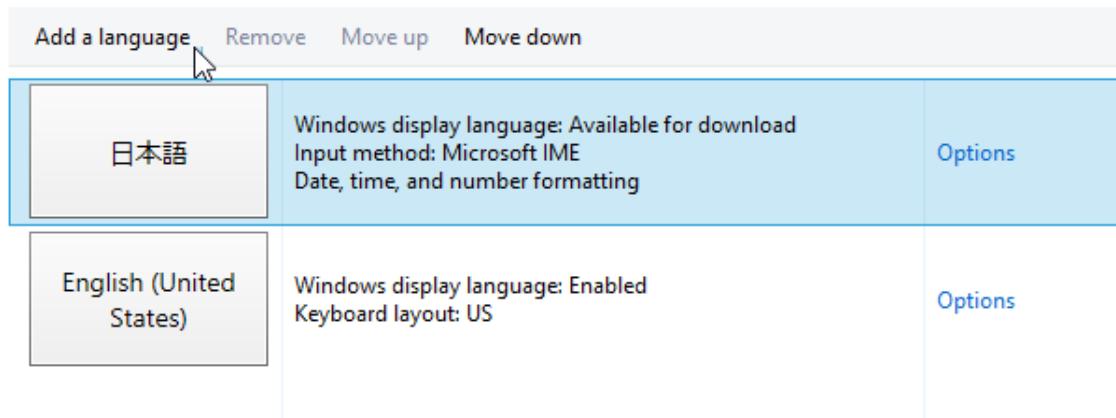
In the Control Panel I go to "Add a Language:"



I already have Japanese installed on my system, so use your imagination, please. You can see that there is an option to “Add a Language.”

### Change your language preferences

Add languages you want to use to this list. The language at the top of your list is your primary language (the one you want to see and use most often).

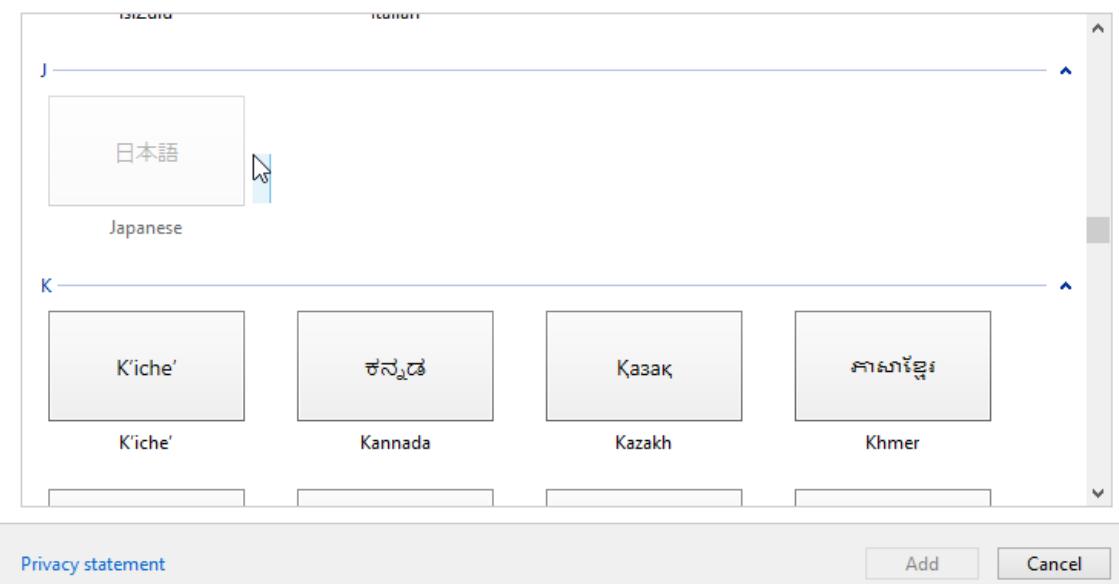


Then I just go and find “Japanese:”

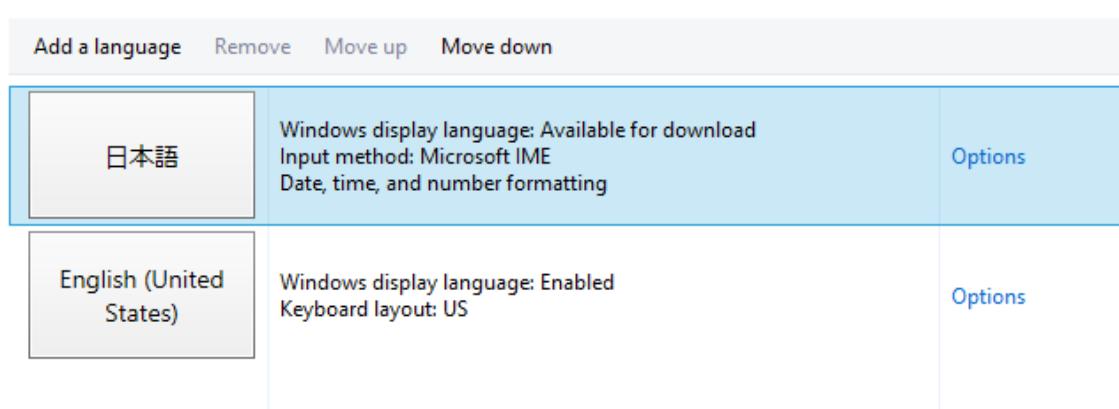
## Add a language

Use the search box to find more languages.

Group languages by:



Select it, click “Add,” then boom. Japanese! After that, I can go “Options,” which is to the right of the language listed:



Here I have my input methods and display languages all set up:

## Japanese

### Windows display language

A language pack for Japanese is available for download

 [Download and install language pack](#)

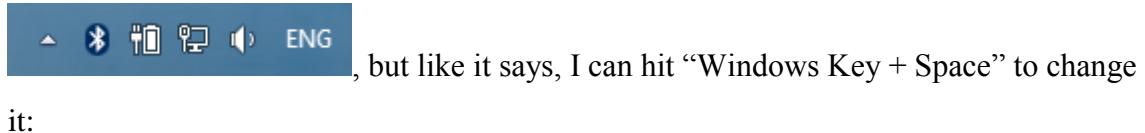
### Input method

 Microsoft IME

[Options](#) | [Remove](#)

[Add an input method](#)

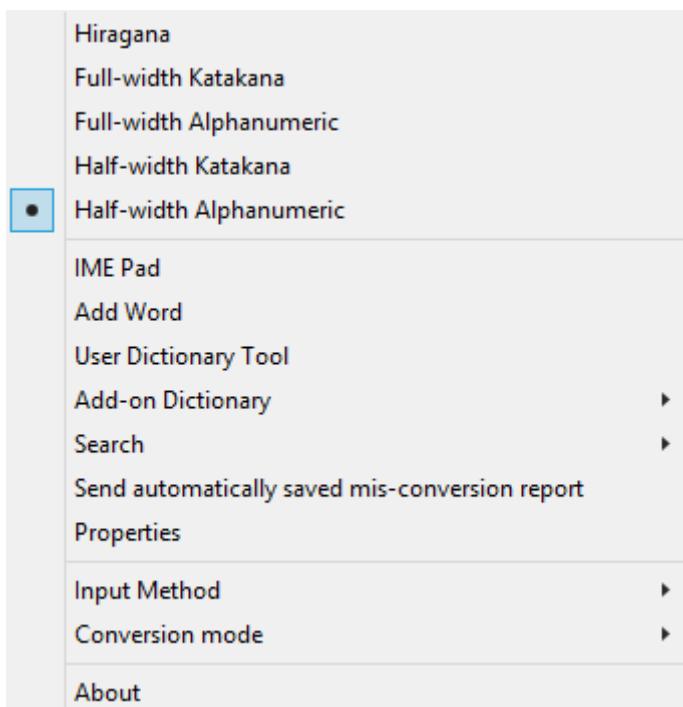
When I want to type in Japanese, I can use the language bar in the bottom right of the screen. Right now mine says ENG, because I'm typing in English:



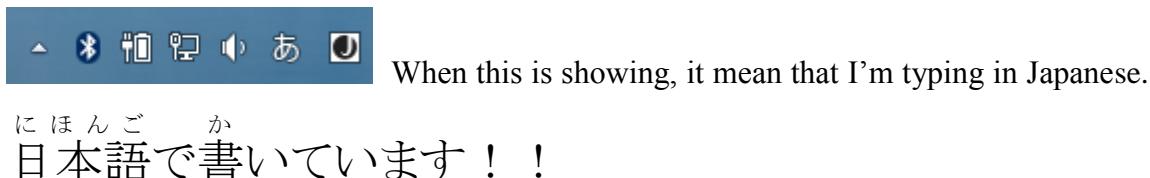
Doing so switches it to a weird A and J:



If I right-click the A, it'll bring up the IME options:



I can hit “Ctrl + Caps Lock” or left click the A to switch to “Hiragana” input mode, which will look like this:



Yay! I would write this in more detail, but your system is probably different... or will be different in a few months. I'll leave the tech to the tech blog writers. For those who are interested though, there is a long list of options for input methods, and you can change lots of hotkeys and all that good stuff until you really find a Japanese input method that fits your style.

### [Set Your Phone's Language to Japanese](#)

I remember the first time I changed my phone's language to Japanese, I got this screen saying that it was “Setting Language.”



せってい  
Looking at that, I kind of panicked, because I didn't know the word or kanji for **設定**  
/ *settei*, “to set” (設定中 / *setteichuu* for “setting”), and I realized that this was  
going to be a very painful transition.

It gets even more exciting when you use Google Maps or something and all of the place names are written in Japanese. That took some serious getting used to. Nowadays, though, I don't even think about it. My phone has been in Japanese for years now, so it hasn't been a problem for a very long time.

### *Japanify Your Web Browser*

---

This basically equates to bookmarking a whole bunch of Japanese sites, and then installing a browser plugin like [Rikaisama](#), which we talked about [back in Phase #1](#).

But how do I find cool sites in Japanese?!

Why, I thought you'd never ask. For example, if we go to [this page on Alexa](#), we can see the sites that get the most traffic in Japan. Removing shopping sites, porn sites and stuff that doesn't help much for this (Google and Facebook, for example), we get some pretty sweet ideas:

- ✧ [Yahoo.co.jp](#): Japanese version of popular portal site.
- ✧ [Fc2.com](#): This is another popular blogging site in Japan.
- ✧ [Nicovideo.jp](#): This video site is kind of like YouTube, I guess. Only everything's in Japanese. You have to create an account in order to view videos, but it seems to be totally free. I've only spent a few minutes looking at.
- ✧ [Livedoor.com](#): News, blogs, weather, email... and all in Japanese!
- ✧ [Ameblo.jp](#): We already talked about this one quite a bit.
- ✧ [Dmm.com](#): Lots and lots of articles and whatnot. (Be careful, because dmm.co.jp is a porn site...)
- ✧ [Matome.Naver.jp](#): This site compiles lists and articles. You'll come across it a lot once you start using Japanese search engines.
- ✧ [Pixiv.net](#): If you like anime and manga, you'll probably love this site. People post drawings. If you want to practice some Japanese, why not comment? Get involved.

Obviously this list doesn't even scratch the surface of just how much is out there, but it might be a good place to start.

### *Turning Your Homepage Japanese*

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Personally, I like to have my browser's homepage be a blank tab... or perhaps just Google. But my next choice would probably be a site that's in Japanese. Anything other than my email or a social networking site, as setting those as my homepage is almost certain to cost me countless hours of time wasted, time I could have spent doing something more productive. So maybe if you find a site that you love in Japanese, you could put it as your homepage. Or you could try this...

#### *Set Your Homepage to a Random Japanese Article*

Did you know that Wikipedia has a built-in link for random articles? Some people use this random-article link as their homepage, because they want to learn lots of interesting stuff. Sounds to me like a huge distraction that we should avoid at all costs.

But what if that distraction was in Japanese? If you use this scary-looking link, it will take you to a random Japanese Wikipedia article:

- ✧ Japanese character version: [ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/特別:おまかせ表示](http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/特別:おまかせ表示)
- ✧ English encoding version:  
<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%89%B9%E5%88%A5:%E3%81%8A%E3%81%BE%E3%81%8B%E3%81%9B%E8%A1%A8%E7%A4%BA>

Both of those are actually the same link. The bottom version is just how web browsers read Japanese characters.

So if you set either of those as your browser's homepage link, then every time you opened your web browser, you'd be faced with yet another terrifying block of Japanese text. Yay!

Before you go thinking that that's masochistic and crazy, remember that you don't have to read the entire article. Realistically, you probably won't even look at it over 90% of the time. However, on days that you do read it, just try to read the first sentence. That's usually all you need in order to understand what an article's about anyways. And with awesome tools like the [web browser plugins I talked about in Phase #1](#), you don't even

really need to do anything other than hover your mouse over each word. For example, let's follow that link to a random page:



The screenshot shows a Japanese Wikipedia article titled "国道82号線 (アメリカ合衆国)". The page content includes a brief description of the highway, its route from the Mississippi River to the West Coast, and its endpoints in Georgia and California. It also lists the states it passes through. To the right of the text is a sidebar with a route marker for "U.S. Route 82" and a map of the United States showing the highway's path. Below the map is a table with the highway's length, year established, and western endpoint.

路線延長	2,589 km (1,609 mi) <sup>[1]</sup>
制定年	1932年 <sup>[1]</sup>
西端	5470 国道54号線/国道70号線(ニューメキシコ州アラモゴード)

Hmm... I wonder what this is about. Using my masterful powers of perception, I'm going to go ahead and guess that it's about U.S. Route 82:



The screenshot shows a page for "U.S. Route 82". It features a large route marker for "U.S. Route 82" and a map of the United States highlighting the highway's route. Below the map is a table with the highway's length and year established.

路線延長	2,589 km (1,609 mi) <sup>[1]</sup>
制定年	1932年 <sup>[1]</sup>

I'd like to break down the meaning of the first sentence of this random article. If you're

still an absolute beginner of Japanese (pre-Phase #3), then this explanation might sound very intimidating. I promise, however, that it would make total sense after your year of studying Japanese. Not only that, but after a couple of years of studying you should be able to go through the whole process that I'm about to explain within only a few seconds. Personally, I don't really have to think about all of this stuff anymore. I've read so many sentences like the one that I'm about to deconstruct that understanding the meaning has become second nature to me.

However, when I was at a lower level, I always wished that people would break down grammar like this for me, so let's give it a go.

Let's imagine that I'm just a high beginner at Japanese still. I can read straightforward Japanese sentences with no problems, and I can form my own basic sentences. For such a student, deconstructing a sentence like the one that's found in this Wikipedia article is totally feasible. Fun, even, if you're a language nerd like me.

I can use [Rikaisama](#) to scroll over each word (excluding particles like は) in the first sentence of this article:

国道 82 号線（こくどう 82 ごうせん、英：U.S. Route 82）は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道（ハイウェイ）である。

国道 こくどう  
(n) national highway; (P)  
国 くに  
(n,obs,arch) country; (the) state; region; province (of Japan); home (i.e. hometown, home country); land; earth; (P)

国道82号線（こくどう82ごうせん、英：U.S. Route 82）は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道（ハイウェイ）である。

ミシシッ 82 号 ごう  
トサンス (n,n-suf) number; edition; make; model; issue; part of that group; sobriquet; pen-name; (P)

国<sup>こく</sup>道<sup>どう</sup>82号<sup>ごう</sup>線<sup>せん</sup>（こくどう82ごうせん、英:U.S. Route 82）は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道（ハイウェイ）である。主にミシシッピ州中部とマーカー州南部を横切る道路で、1932年から建設が始められ、最終的に1990年に東西一貫の線路となる。

(n,n-suf) line; stripe; stria; line (e.g. telephone line); wire; ray (e.g. X-ray); beam; line (e.g. of a railroad); track; route; lane; outline; contours; form; level; division; (P)

、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

33 アメリカ合衆国 (始まり、最終的に1990年に西はニューメキシコ州のホワ  
m アメリカ合衆国 アメリカがっしゅうこく  
ク (n) United States of America; (P)  
= 亞米利加 アメリカ  
= 西墨利加 アメリカ

国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)が始まり、最終的に1990年に西側ルートと東側ルートが合流する。南部なんぶ (n) southern part; the south (of a region); (P) 南みなみ (n) south; (P)

那を東西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

## アメリカ合衆国の国道

まり、最終的に2000年に西海岸のナミコ湖の土砂災害

## 東西 とうざい

(n,adj-no,exp,abbr) east and west; Orient and Occident; East and West; Ladies and Gentlemen! Your attention, please! roll-up, roll-up; (P)

二本 東西 ひがしに

1/20/2019 10:00 AM (PDT) [/n/adi/no-exp/askt/east-and-west- Orient-and-Occident- East-and-West- \(P\)](#)

西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

## アメリカ合衆国の国道

最終的 - 4,000 年 - 三十一 - 111 - 111 八十口 /

走る はしる

57. **vi** to run; to travel (movement of vehicles); to drive; to hurry to; to retreat (from battle); to take flight; to run away from home; to elope; to tend heavily toward; (P)

## 国 走 そ う

卷之三

西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

最終的にアメリカ国道はニューメキシコ州のホワイ

った亞米利加 アメリカ

号線 亞墨利加 アメリカ

(n,uk,ateji) America; United States of America; (P)

国 餡 あめ

(n,abbr) (hard) candy; toffee; rice-sugar; sugar made from the

東西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

最終的に1990年に西はニューメキシコ州のホワイ

なった「11

国道 こくどう

95号線 (n) national highway; (P)

り、国 くに

(n,obs,arch) country; (the) state; region; province (of Japan); home (i.e.

earth; (P)

るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

アメリカ合衆国の国道

に1990年に西はニューメキシコ州のホワイ

ハイウェイ

(n) highway; (P)

傍らの交差(はい

4号線と国(こくどう) (int, pol) yes; OK (used to get attention prior to an utterance); okay; giddy-up; giddap; (P)

ハイ

に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

アメリカ合衆国の国道

最終的に1990年に西はニューメキシコ州のホワイ

たである

(v5r-i) to be (formal, literary)

号線 であ

国(こく) (aux,abbr,arch) to be

出 で

Just using [Rikaisama](#), I can form a messed-up, word-for-word translation of this sentence:

国道 82 号線 (こくどう 82 ごうせん、英: U.S. Route 82) は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道(ハイウェイ)である。

National highway / 82 number route ([hiragana reading of 国道 82 号線], British: U.S.

Route 82) *wa*, / United States of America / southern part / *wo* / east and west / *ni* / to run / America / national highway / is.

Before we try to translate that into more natural English, a note about Japanese Wikipedia articles: **The topic of the article is almost always written inside of parentheses in both hiragana and in English.** So, when we see this:

国道82号線(こくどう82ごうせん、英:U.S. Route 82)は、  
ミシシッピ州中部とアーカンソー州南部を横切る道路に19

We can assume that 国道 82 号線 = こくどう82ごうせん = U.S. Route 82.

In a way, it's almost like Wikipedia is giving us a Japanese-English translation as a bonus. Wikipedia articles even do this quite often for Japan-related articles. For example, check out this beast:

## 東海大学医療技術短期大学

東海大学医療技術短期大学(とうかいだいがくいりょうぎじゅつたんきだいがく、英語: Tokai University Junior College of Nursing and Medical Technology)は、神奈川県平塚市北金目4-1-2に本部を置く日本の私立短期大学である。1974年に設置された。

Way too many scary kanji, right? But I can see the reading of the kanji and the English right beside it, which makes this super easy: 東海大学医療技術短期大学 = とうかいだいがくいりょうぎじゅつたんきだいがく = Tokai University Junior College of Nursing and Medical Technology.

So, going back to our example:

国道 82 号線 (こくどう 82 ごうせん、英: U.S. Route 82) は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道 (ハイウェイ) である。

I now know that the text in bold all means "U.S. Route 82." All I have left now is: USA / southern part / *wo* / east-west / *ni* / to run / US National Highway (highway) / to be.

Let's deconstruct this a bit more. I'll write it again in Japanese, putting "U.S. Route 82" for the first part and deleting the extra word "highway."

**U.S. Route 82** は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道である。

See in bold above? は (*wa*) is my topic marker, and at the end of the sentence I see である (*de aru*), which Rikaisama tells me is a formal version of "to be." In other words, it means です (*desu*). If I've been studying Japanese for a little while now (if I'm into or past Phase #3), I should have no problem understanding that:

U.S. Route 82 は…である = U.S. Route 82 is...

So now I have my subject and verb. All I need is to work my way into the middle part of this sentence:

U.S. Route 82 は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道である。

When a noun (like アメリカ国道 / *amerika kokudou* / "US Highway") comes right before "to be" (である、です、だ / *de aru, desu, da* / "to be," "to be," "to be"), then that noun is probably the object of my sentence. So I get...

U.S. Route 82 は…アメリカ国道である。

≡

U.S. Route 82 is a U.S. Highway...

Progress! Let's move even further into the center of this sentence:

U.S. Route 82 は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道である。

If a verb in Japanese (走る / *hashiru* / "to run," for example) is right before a noun (like アメリカ国道 / *amerika kokudou* / "US Highway"), then that verb (走る) probably

modifies that noun (アメリカ国道). So “to run” + “U.S. Highway” = “U.S. Highway running”

U.S. Route 82 は…走るアメリカ国道である。

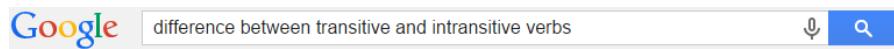
—

U.S. Route 82 is a U.S. Highway running...

Okay, so things are starting to come together. There is only a little bit further to go:

U.S. Route 82 は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道である。

At some point in your first year of Japanese studies, you will come across a very enlightening explanation of the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs. If I recall correctly, there's a particularly nice explanation of this in [\*A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar\*](#). I didn't even know what a transitive verb was until I started studying Japanese, so you might need to take a look at that, too. The short explanation is that a transitive verb is a verb (A) that takes an object (B): “I bought (A) a beer (B).” The long explanation is what happens when you type “difference between transitive and intransitive verbs” [into Google](#):



Web Videos Images News Shopping More ▾ Search tools

About 125,000 results (0.17 seconds)

**Transitive and Intransitive Verbs - TestMagic**

[www.testmagic.com/Knowledge.../transitive\\_intransitive/intro\\_01.htm](http://www.testmagic.com/Knowledge.../transitive_intransitive/intro_01.htm) ▾  
Transitive and Intransitive Verbs This exercise was written by Erin Billy. The Difference Between Transitive and Intransitive Verbs. My sister broke the window.

**Transitive and Intransitive Verbs - Definition, Examples**

[www.k12reader.com/term/transitive-and-intransitive-verbs/](http://www.k12reader.com/term/transitive-and-intransitive-verbs/) ▾  
What is the difference between the two verbs in the above sentences? At first thought, you may say the definition but forget about the meaning. Instead ...

**Transitive and Intransitive Verbs - CliffsNotes**

[www.cliffsnotes.com/Writing/English/CliffsNotes](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/Writing/English/CliffsNotes) ▾  
In the following examples, notice the difference between the direct and indirect objects. The direct ... Many verbs can be either transitive or intransitive. She sings ...

**Difference Between Transitive and Intransitive Verbs ...**

[www.differencebetween.net/.../difference-between-transitive-and-intransi...](http://www.differencebetween.net/.../difference-between-transitive-and-intransi...) ▾  
Transitive vs Intransitive Verbs It can be difficult to describe the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs, even if you can recognize them when.

**Transitive and Intransitive Verbs - Quick and Dirty Tips**

[www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/.../transitive-and-intransitive-verb...](http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/.../transitive-and-intransitive-verb...) ▾  
Dec 31, 2014 - It helps to know the difference between transitive and intransitive ...  
Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive, depending on how they are ...

Anyways, anytime we see を (wo), it's pretty safe to assume that it's telling us two things: (1) the next verb we see is a transitive verb and (2) the word right before it is the object of that verb. According to this explanation:

U.S. Route 82 は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道である。

走る = “to run” = “running” (based on above explanation) = transitive verb

アメリカ合衆国南部 = “USA + southern part” = “southern part of the USA” = object

U.S. Route 82 は、アメリカ合衆国南部を(東西に)走るアメリカ国道である。

U.S. Route 82 is a U.S. Highway running(東西に)the southern part of the USA.

All we have left is 東西に, which is “east-west” and *ni*. に is a particle that, among other things, marks place or direction. Sometimes it means “to,” so we can try “to east-west,” but that sounds kind of strange, especially because we have “to run.” If we said “to run east-west” we might get the idea to say “to run from east to west.” Our “from” is lost in the middle of 東西 “east-west.”

Let's add it all up:

U.S. Route 82 は、アメリカ合衆国南部を東西に走るアメリカ国道である。  
U.S. Route 82 is a U.S. Highway running from east to west across the southern part of the USA.

Now we can check our answer by... looking at [the English article](#)! It says:

***U.S. Route 82 is an east–west United States highway in the southern United States.***

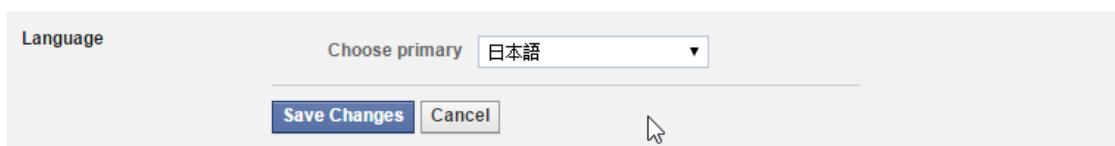
Simple, concise. Better than my translation, yeah, but the meaning is the same for both. And that's all we're worried about really. Actually, looking at the English version, I get the sense that the "author" of the Japanese version just translated his sentence straight from the English page.

Sorry, I kind of got lost in that explanation. However, that's exactly the point of what we're talking about here. By doing something like setting your homepage as a random Japanese Wikipedia article, you create the conditions for this thing to happen randomly. You see a Japanese word in the first sentence of some scary-looking article that popped up on your homepage. So you scroll over it with Rikaisama. Then one thing leads to another, and before you know it you've been studying Japanese for the last ten minutes, thirty minutes, five hours. These are types of beneficial distraction that can arise from a truly immersive environment... if and when you're ready for one.

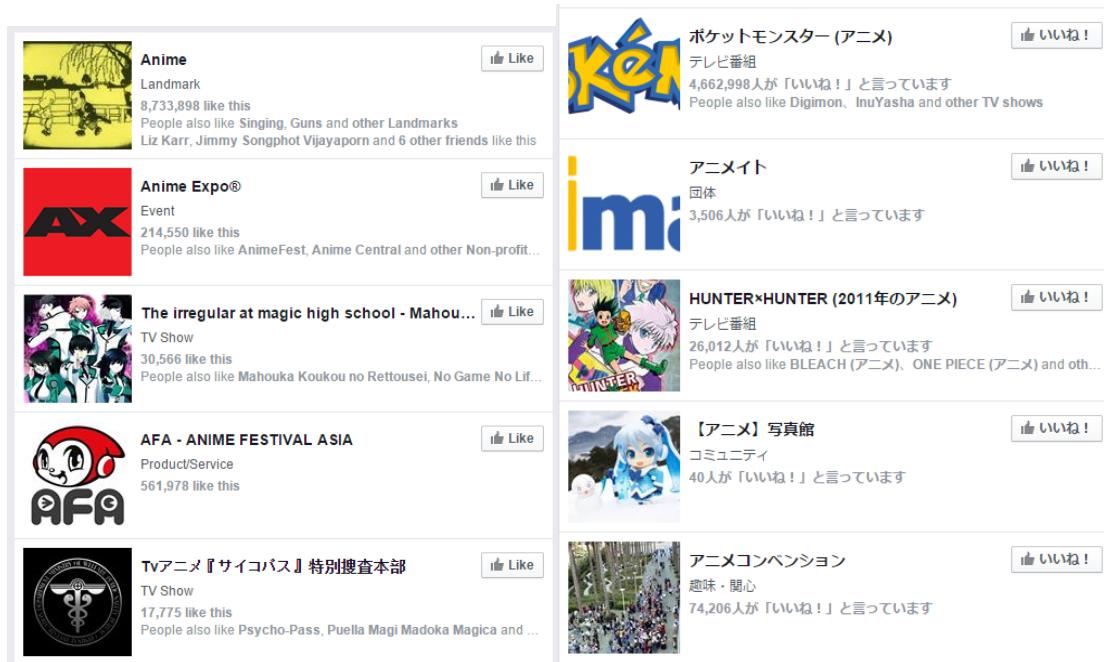
### [Turning Your Facebook Feed Japanese](#)

Let's face it: Everyone is spending much more time on Facebook than they'd like to admit. Sometimes you're just sitting there, nothing to do, and by habit you end up opening your news feed.

Since you're wasting time on your news feed, you might as well waste time on your news feed *in Japanese*. First, we can change our Facebook language to Japanese by going to the settings:



This is important, because Facebook will show us more Japanese content. For example, if I type アニメ (anime) into the Facebook search bar while my Facebook is still set to English, then the results I get are all in English (left), but if I type アニメ (anime) after changing my Facebook account's language setting to Japanese, then the results are all in Japanese (right):



An even better idea would be to search Groups:



This will lead me to a bunch of groups of people who like anime, and if I look at individual groups, I can see a lot of people posting and interacting in Japanese:

アニメ部  
公開グループ  
ANIME MANGA GAME LOVERS ONLY !!!! FEEL FREE TO ADD FRIENDS!!!! 日本のサブカルチャーを愛してる方、誰でも大歓迎...  
メンバー2,283人

アニメ  
非公開グループ  
アニメ、ラノベ、コミック、ゲームの話の雑談をメインに、たまに人気投票もします。 関連ページ: facebookページ:アニメランキン...  
メンバー3,090人

アニメ | 漫画  
公開グループ  
アニメ アニメは、アニメーションの略語。アニメーションを用いて構成された映像作品全般を指す。本項では、主に日本で製作され...  
メンバー1,084人

アニメ Animé  
非公開グループ  
メンバー26人

アニメ、マンガ、ゲーム、オタク、腐女子...  
非公開グループ  
FEEL FREE TO ADD FRIENDS XD 来る者拒まず 去る者は追わず なんでも語り合おうぜ Anybody can join, and let's talk about...  
メンバー6,554人

Yuuki Hiraoka 11時間前  
リヴァイ兵長！秘儀  
千手観音！！

いいね！ · シエア

12人がいいね！と言っています。

他1件のコメントを表示

Yuuki Hiraoka ムゲン・ザ・バンドってやつ?  
10時間前 · いいね！ · 2

芝田 吉重 力ニ?  
5時間前 · いいね！ · 1

折負尊 煮牛 タカアンドトシのトシ風に突っ込むなら「(桜木)花道か！w」  
5時間前 · いいね！ · 1

It doesn't have to be something like anime, either. Maybe I like drinking, in which case I could type ビール / *biiru* / "beer," and it will bring up groups of other people who like beer, too... along with some people who are actually searching for drinking buddies! (Be careful, everyone, yeah?)

ビール会  
公開グループ  
メンバー16人

ビールで乾杯！Cheers with beer!  
公開グループ  
【参加自由】 <If you are a beer lover, please do not hesitate to join us!> 今日はどんなビールを飲んでますか？ To all beer lovers...  
メンバー2,102人

ビールで日本を元気にしようの会  
公開グループ  
ビール大好きの大島圭太が昨年より立ち上げましたっ！この指とまれっ！「ビールで日本を元気にしようの会」プレスリリースは...  
メンバー351人

ビール部  
非公開グループ  
メンバー10人

世界ビール飲み隊  
公開グループ  
メンバー41人

長谷川 基 19時間前  
普段は焼酎の水割りを呑んでるんだけど、たまにビールが呑みたくなる時 がって近所のスーパーで買ってきます。でもたまには居酒屋等で呑みた いと思ってみたり！(笑)

いいね！ · シエア

11人がいいね！と言っています。

大島 圭太 ボクはたまにスーパーでお惣菜買って来て盛り付けて'自宅居酒屋飲 み'やりますっ(笑)かんぱーい！！

If I join like 50 groups and follow like 100 different pages that always post content in

Japanese for Japanese speakers, with Japanese people commenting on them, then I will be much more likely to run into Japanese every time I try to waste time by logging into Facebook... right?

Have fun in your search for fun stuff!

### *Turning Your Twitter Feed Japanese*

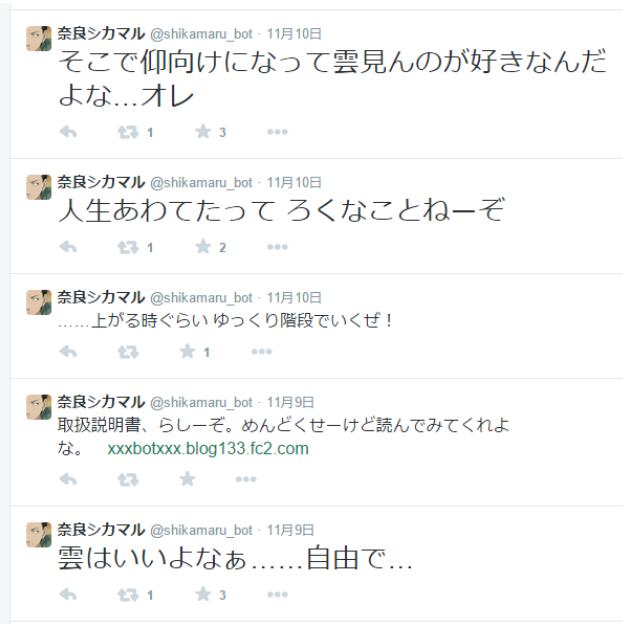
I don't really use Twitter, to tell the truth. But Japanese people are all over it. For a long time, it was more popular than Facebook in Japan. I don't know if that's still the case, but it's certainly worth checking out.

One option is to try searching for the names of your favorite characters from TV shows. For example, if I type シカマル / Shikamaru, which is the name of a popular character from the manga/anime Naruto, then I get these results:



That "bot" at the top posts a number of quotes that the character would be likely to say

(or did actually say... I'm not sure):



Anyways, if you're already using Twitter, then start following some users that post in Japanese. Get you some language-learning!

### [Turning Your YouTube Feed Japanese](#)

I've tried to use YouTube for finding useful, productive Japanese content before... and it was a total failure. The same thing happened for Spanish, too. I think that the main problem boils down to YouTube's search function, which expects me to know which video I'm looking for.

One very simple solution to this would be to sign up for an account on the [FluentU](#) Japanese site, as they already go and find the videos for you, then add interactive subtitles to them. If you're like me, however, you only watch videos sporadically, so it doesn't really make sense to sign up for a paid service.

Instead, I've tasked Rei, my partner in crime, with finding fun and interesting Japanese YouTube channels for us. Here's what she's found so far:

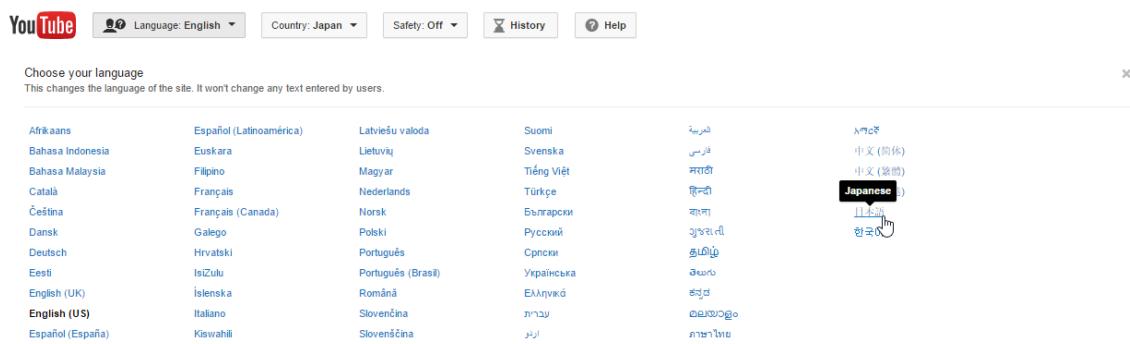
ActZero: [日本人のチャンネル登録者数が多い YouTuber](#)

## トップテンをまとめてみた

For all you Japanese nerds like me, that basically says “Collection of the Top 10 Japanese YouTuber Channels with the Most Subscribers.”

Native speakers sure are good at finding good content in their own language, aren’t they? If you know of any other interesting YouTube channels, please [email me](#), and I’ll add them to the guide.

By the way, it also helps to change your YouTube account’s language setting to Japanese:



You can find these settings at the bottom of the page when you click on your profile settings. (Actually, I think they’re always at the bottom of every page.) Setting your YouTube to Japanese, means that you will be able to watch videos with Japanese subtitles, when available.

For example, if I go look at the channel of [teraminato](#), a Japanese guy who talks about Japanese snacks and whatnot, I can click the subtitles option (my mouse is hovering over it in the image below) on one of his videos to see the Japanese on the screen. Nice!



(That *onigiri* on the right is Tuna Mayo, by the way, the kind with the dry, crunchy *nori* on the outside, which my childlike palate craves pretty much every day.)

Also, finding one Japanese-language channel is the key to finding many channels. Continuing with the previous example, if I go to [teraminato's channel](#), for instance, I can also check out all of his “Recommended Channels” and the “Related Channels” that pop up on the side of the screen. Then I can go to each of those channels and do the same thing, until I have a plethora of channel options:



And then every time you watch one of the videos on one of those channels, you can also browse the related videos that pop up on the right side of the screen:



I could probably spend a whole day poring through those channels, just trying to figure out which videos are good and which ones suck. At least it would be a whole day spent trying to understand Japanese, though! Also, after that whole day of “wasted time,” YouTube would probably start recommending me Japanese videos all of the time, and thus I will have successfully immersed my YouTube account in Japanese.

One last, super incredible thing: **It is totally possible to download a YouTube video and it's subtitles into your Anki flashcard deck.** For more info on how to do this, please go check out the [section on studying Japanese through anime](#).

### Turning Your Email Inbox Japanese

In other phases of this book, I talked about [using language exchanges](#). If you sign up for one of the sites that have language exchanges, then send the same exact private message to dozens of different users, I guarantee you that you will start getting replies in Japanese.



Write your intro message in both English and Japanese. Your language exchange partner will appreciate this, because it shows that (1) they don't have to worry about sucking at English, and (2) you're not a selfish language-learner who's going to refuse to teach them any Japanese at all whatsoever. Talk about your interests, hopes, and dreams, whatever. And maybe include a note about how you'd like to do language exchange (by email, Skype, etc.). Include a Line username if you have one. (If you don't have [Line](#), by the way, you should get it, because everyone in Japan is using it.)

Once you have a message that seems to strike a chord with people, post it on [Lang-8.com](#) and get it corrected. As a result, you'll have an accurate, persuasive intro message for language exchange that you can keep using with a hundred different people. Low-level English speakers are also likely to write lots of Japanese if you appear to be good at Japanese. As soon as a Japanese person suspects that their speaking partner's Japanese is better than their English, quite often they will switch to using Japanese entirely... maybe because they're embarrassed or something.

Long story short, if you messaged new people consistently over a solid period of time, then you'd probably be getting new emails and messages every single day in Japanese from new friends all over the globe. Before you know it, Japanese will have lodged itself securely in yet another facet of your life—and you won't be able to escape. You'll want to keep in touch with all of those friends, after all, right?

*Immersing Your Entertainment in Japanese*



This is the section where a lot of readers tend to be even more well-informed than I am. What can I say? I know a lot about the Japanese language, but not too much about Japanese pop culture. \*Shame\*

That's what I get for not watching TV the last five years.

We're all human. As such, there will be times when we just don't feel like studying. There will be times when the only thing we can bear doing is sitting on the couch or lying in bed and staring at a screen that helps us enjoy a bit of relaxation.

Some call this laziness. In moderation, though, it can be quite a good thing. And study ninjas can turn it into a fun and relaxing study method. If you're going to watch TV, watch TV in Japanese. If you're going to listen to music, listen to music in Japanese. If you're going to read a book, read a book in or about Japanese. This stuff will be tiring at first, but eventually you will find material that interests you, and you will reach a level where you can enjoy it without any effort.

The initial stages of immersing your life in Japanese can be grueling. Just keep swimming, though. **It will get easier every single day.** Even if you don't feel like it's getting easier, trust me, it is. And once it gets a tiny bit easier about 1000 days in a row,

you'll be pretty proud of just how far you've come.

In this section, I'm only talking about how to immerse your life in Japanese media. I'm not talking about how to study through Japanese media, which is something that [I talk about later](#) in this guide.

Nevertheless, I have searched high and low to find awesome sources of Japanese entertainment media for the world's many insatiable consumers. The following list is forever a work in progress, so please contact me if you know of any kind of

awesomeness that needs to be added なるべく早く (ASAP).

### *Where and How to Find Japanese Music*

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I've never been a big fan of the Japanese music scene. Yet, that's no excuse to deprive you of the tunes that you just might love, yeah? Here are some options...

- ✧ [NicoNicoVideo.jp](#): I mentioned this site earlier. There are a lot of music videos on here.
- ✧ [Billboard.com's Japan Hot 100](#): While western music is certainly becoming more and more popular in Japan, most of their billboard charts are still populated by Japanese artists. You can see a list of the current top charts on this page, and you can even go back to look at previous weeks.
- ✧ [Animex Music](#): This site is dedicated to music from anime.
- ✧ [8Tracks Anime Playlists](#): 8Tracks is pretty much my favorite music site of all time. People make and share awesome playlists. Some of those people love anime and Japanese music... so they make anime and Japanese playlists. And we reap all of the benefits.

Surely there are a lot more resources than that, but it's just not my area of expertise. I still haven't been able to find any Japanese artists that really resonated with me, unfortunately.

### *Where and How to Find Japanese Anime*

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I really need to get someone to write a guest column about this, because I'm not a very good person to ask. I'd start with these websites though:

- ✧ [Crunchyroll](#): This is probably one of the easiest ways to get access to some anime, but I don't know how useful it would be for studying, which I talk about [towards the end of this guide](#).
- ✧ The Unsavory Approach: There's no denying that the most effective way to download good anime in Japanese with various options for subtitles is to use a VPN that protects your privacy like [BitGuard](#), [PIA](#), or [CyberGhost](#) along with a torrent downloader like [uTorrent](#) and a torrent search engine like [Kickass Torrents](#), [The Pirate Bay](#), or [Torrentz](#). The Japanese government keeps trying to hit people with penalties and regulations for the massive amount of illegal downloading that takes place. However, at the same time, for a lot of people studying Japanese the main problem is access to the materials that they need. I need digital downloads of videos with separate subtitle files so that [I can make flashcards with them](#). Aside from the fact that one can't buy most anime outside of Japan, this option is not available on licensed, paid sites. So this leaves people little option but to resort to tactics such as the ones described above.
- ✧ [Hummingbird.me](#): This site is dedicated entirely to tracking, sharing, and discovering new anime. While this technically isn't a source of anime, it is a source of ideas for anime to watch.
- ✧ [Sidereel's Japanese anime show category](#): This site is kind of like Hummingbird.me, only it's for TV shows in general. They have a pretty extensive anime list, too, though.
- ✧ [Anime-Japan.jp](#): This is basically an anime news site. What I really like about this site is that it's in both Japanese and English. Why not try challenging the Japanese side of things?

Am I missing some awesome stuff? Probably. Please [tell me about it](#).

### *Where and How to Find Japanese Manga*

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A lot of the information that I wrote for the anime section also applies to manga. As for buying manga, I think that the easiest option is to get a kindle from [Amazon](#), then download manga from [Amazon.co.jp](#). If you don't want to buy a kindle, then I think you can get international shipping, also.

It is possible to use a kindle for two different Amazon sites. **The trick is to use a different email address for each Amazon site.** Then you can log out of one account and log into the other whenever you feel like it. This does not delete your books.

The cool thing about all of this is that you can buy off of Amazon with a credit card from anywhere, unlike how the Japanese iTunes store requires a Japanese credit card of an iTunes card bought in Japan (they sell these on [PlayAsia.com](http://PlayAsia.com), by the way).

Here is the [manga section of Amazon.co.jp](#). Enjoy!

### *Where and How to Find Japanese Books*

---

Well, uh... the same exact thing I just said for manga.

If you're still a beginner, then a novel is probably going to make you cry, and a children's book is probably going to put you to sleep. Even with the materials that I'm about to mention, we're getting into some pretty advanced-level stuff here. So it might make your head spin. But then, if your head is spinning, then maybe that means you're learning something?

まんが やさ わ  
The マンガで優しく分かる / *manga de yasashiku wakaru* / “Easy

Understanding Through Manga” series of books are really helpful. They're 説明書 / *setsumeisho* / “explanatory texts,” so they're not too hard to read. There are usually very clear (and sometimes monotonous) explanations, plus manga dialogues that emphasize key points. So far I've read a [Japanese manga explanation](#) of [Neuro-Linguistic Programming](#) and [the Japanese manga version](#) of [The E-Myth: Revisited](#). Both were pretty enjoyable and straightforward. Via manga, you can also study [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), [Leadership](#), [NLP \(1\)](#), [NLP \(2\)](#), [Coaching](#), [Logical Thinking](#), and [Problem-Solving](#). I think maybe reading Manga Self-Help Books in Japanese might be the height of nerd-dom as we know it. It's amazing. I have officially reached max nerd-dom, everyone. Please don't tell my girlfriend. I mean, as it is, if she catches me “studying up on” topics like “Outer Space,” “Physics,” or “Semiconductors,” I might be hard-pressed explaining myself:



[Understanding Through  
Manga: Outer Space](#)

[Understanding Through  
Manga: Physics](#)

[Understanding Through  
Manga: Semiconductors](#)

[iBooks](#) Samples are another cool option. If you have an [iPad](#) and access to the Japanese iTunes Store, then you might want to think about looking at the iBooks Store (in Japanese, of course) and downloading free samples of books. Usually you get the first 30-50 pages for free. So, for example, my iPad has a ton of free samples of Japanese books on everything from Zen Buddhism to Tips on Sounding Intelligent. My rule is that I can't purchase a book unless I read the whole sample first. As expected, usually I get tired of books before I finish the sample.

That's all for this section! Have fun getting immersed in Japanese! Also, be careful to stay productive, not just active, like we [talked about in Phase #1](#).

#### Phase #4 Progress:

- ✓ Completely Immerse Yourself in Japanese
- Shift Your Study Focus

### Shifting Your Study Focus

Just to reiterate, Phase #4 is taking place after Phases #1-3. In other words, the focus shifts that I'll be talking about in this lesson are intended to take place after a solid year of studying. Ultimately it's your decision. It's not my place to tell you what you should study at what time. As long as you're focused on something that's appropriate for your

level in a structured, time-efficient manner, than any type of studying is both worthwhile and commendable.

For those who intend to follow this guide closely, though, I recommend the following shifts in your study style upon the successful completion of Phases #1-3, right around the 1 year marker if you are starting Japanese from scratch.

### *Focus Shift #1 – Continue Year 1 Studying (Expand Decks)*

One of the core philosophies of this guide is that if you build something grand and magnificent, you won't want to let it go to ruin.

I often see blog posts and videos about language learning in which people debate at length regarding the purported usefulness of spaced repetition systems like Anki for acquiring foreign language proficiency. They're not the most effective way to spend your time, some say. Memory palaces are better, others say. The only way to really retain vocabulary is to speak all day every day for five years straight, they say.

I have no interest in arguing one way or another. The main reason that I study with Anki is not because I think that it's the most effective way to retain vocabulary (although I think it makes there is a pretty solid argument for that). **The main reason that I study using Anki is because digital flashcards are measurable.** There will almost certainly come a time when you consider quitting your Japanese studies. You might not phrase it so harshly. Usually people say things like, "Ah, my [Japanese] is getting rusty. I haven't practiced in [months]." And then months become years and "rusty" becomes "nonexistent."

It's easy to let something get "rusty," because it's such a vague concept. Oh, wow, I was way better at [Japanese] six months ago, you think.

Letting your SRS flashcards fall to the wayside is an entirely different kind of feeling. You don't think, "Oh, I'm getting rusty." Instead, you think "I studied over 3,000 vocabulary words, and now I'm letting myself forget them!" That's a horrible feeling, and we should all be grateful that that's a horrible feeling, because it will keep many of us from letting Japanese slip away from us.

## Maintaining Your Palace



If you do everything in Phases #1-3, you will have built a magnificent mental palace—Your Personal Japanese Proficiency. It's something that you can be proud of. It's something that you can build upon by furthering your studies. And, most importantly, **it's something that you can maintain with ease.**

If you spent your life savings starting a business, you wouldn't close it down the first week after you finally made a profit. That would be ludicrous. You put all of this time, effort, and money into building this business. Of course you're not going to let it fall apart just because [fill-in-the-blank excuse]. You made a profit this week! Maybe you'll make a bigger profit next week. Maybe in a few years you'll be rich! It would be a waste to give up now.

I think that maintaining your Japanese is very similar. You spent so much time, effort, and (most likely) money building it up that you shouldn't even think about letting it fall apart because of [excuse]. You're finally getting to the point where you can understand some stuff. Yeah, there is still a long road ahead of you, but things are looking up. In a few years you might be at a seriously high level of Japanese. By completing Phases #1-3, we are trying to get to the “profit stage” as quickly as possible, thus motivating ourselves to

stick to our studies.

**We maintain our Japanese by reviewing.**

**We improve our Japanese by learning new things.**

### *Flashcards*

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Ideally, the daily schedule for your flashcards described in Phase #3 will be continued indefinitely into the future.

There will probably come a time when you don't need them anymore. If I'm going to be completely honest, I'm not sure that I need them anymore. I have reached a high enough level of comprehension in the language that immersion in and of itself is a form of constant review. And yet, I *still* do my flashcards every day. I'm not about to see my 17,000-Card Flashcard Palace fall apart.

Our Daily Flashcard Flow & Priorities for Phase #4 is just a slightly modified version of our flow and priorities from Phase #3. I think you'll find the alterations very intriguing:

#### Phase #4 Daily Flashcard Flow & Priorities\*

1. ALL Kanji Review Cards
2. ALL My Vocabulary Review Cards
3. ALL Pre-Loaded Vocabulary Review Cards
4. ALL New Kanji Cards\*\*
5. 0-25 My Vocabulary New Cards (Optional)
6. 0-25 Pre-Loaded Vocabulary New Cards\*\*\* (Optional)
7. ∞ Auto-Generated Video Flashcards\*\*\*\* (Optional)

\*This is assuming that I have completed Phases #1-3, meaning that I have learned 2,200 kanji cards, along with 6000+ vocabulary cards. I must do numbers #1-4 every day in order to get a Blue X on my calendar.

\*\*On most days, the number of new kanji cards will be zero, but there will be some occasions when you come across a non-Jōyō kanji that you want to memorize. After adding it to your kanji deck, should you choose to do so, it would take priority over other new cards, but under all review cards.

\*\*\*If “My Vocabulary Deck” has more than 25 new cards, then I should not do #6, because I will have already hit my New Cards limit for the day while doing #5. But if I get down to zero new cards in “My Vocabulary Deck,” then I am free to do up to 25 new cards from my pre-loaded vocabulary deck. The new vocabulary cards that I’ve created personally will always take priority over the new pre-loaded vocabulary cards (assuming I have added new pre-loaded cards to this deck).

\*\*\*\*[Later on in this guide](#), I talk about how to automatically generate flashcards from anime and YouTube videos with Japanese and English subtitles attached to them. Since these flashcards are pretty much just a fun way to kill time effectively when you’re bored, you’re free to do as many or as little as you feel like per day. Personally, there are some days when I’ll lie in bed and do hundreds of them. Other days, I don’t do any at all.

#### *Listening*

You don’t really need to change your listening habits at all from Phase #3 to Phase #4. If

anything, you can just relax a bit on your “daily listening requirements.” I still think that it would be quite beneficial to continue reviewing with dialogue tracks and pushing forward with main audio tracks taken from [JapanesePod101](#), as I explained [here](#). However, since you will be at a considerably higher level in Phase #4, you don’t necessarily need to be listening to audio “lessons,” per se. Any Japanese audio should be just fine.

For example, if you’ve reached an intermediate level or above, then you could [auto-generate flashcards from your favorite anime](#), then put the audio tracks from the anime onto your listening device(s). This way, when you have spare time and can look at your phone, you can do focused, intensive listening practice. Then, when you don’t have the luxury of looking at your phone, you can just listen to the mp3s of the dialogue tracks that you created when you made your flashcards.

### *[Clean Up and Expand Your Grammar](#)*

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In this guide, I’ve been using the term “grammar” in a very general way. What I’m actually talking about are sentence patterns and constructions, which happen to be quite straightforward in Japanese. I’ll give a specific example.

Let’s say that I was studying my anime flashcards (which, again, I talk about later in this guide), and I see the following phrase:

Anki - Newbie

File Edit Tools Help

Decks Add Browse

This card shows a character from the show 進撃の巨人 / *Shingeki no Kyojin* / “Attack on Titan” saying the following phrase:

おい、エレン、急に大声出すんじゃないやねえよ。

*Oi, Eren, kyuu ni oogoe dasu n ja nee yo.*

Hey, Eren, Don't start yelling so suddenly.



Looking at that phrase, maybe I recognize the following construction:

[Verb] + んじやねえよ

Since I've already studied this grammar before, I know that when we have a construction like this, it means "Quit [verb]-ing," or "Don't [verb]." Since the verb in the action being expressed in the sentence is 大声(を)出す / *oogoe (wo) dasu* / "to start yelling; to start talking loudly," I understand that:

おおごえ だ  
大声(を)出す + んじやねえよ

=

おおごえ だ  
Don't 大声(を)出す

=

Don't start yelling.

Great, I understand it. But understanding a sentence construction is much different than being able to use a sentence construction. So maybe I write down a note to myself that I should try to use this phrase the next time I take a Japanese lesson, do a language exchange via Skype, or write an entry on Lang-8.

It would be extremely rude to use that grammar construction with your language partner or teacher, but there are ways around this. You can just tell them that you'd like to practice making sentences like this one. Then you shoot off a bunch of sentences, trying to mimic the pronunciation you heard in the flashcard (there's a link to the audio above):

な  
泣くんじやねえよ *naku*  
*n-ja-nee-yo* Don't cry.

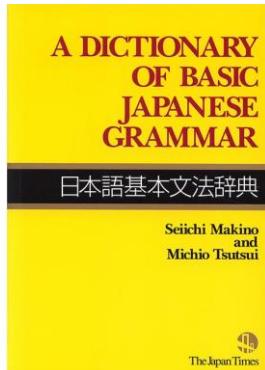
うそ 嘘をつくんじやねえよ	<i>uso wo tsuku</i> <i>n-ja-nee-yo</i>	Don't lie to me.
あせ 焦るんじやねえよ	<i>aseru</i> <i>n-ja-nee-yo</i>	Don't rush.
おれ 俺のせいにするんじや ねえよ	<i>ore no sei ni</i> <i>suru</i> <i>n-ja-nee-yo</i>	Don't blame (it on) me!
の 飲むんじやねえよ	<i>nomu</i> <i>n-ja-nee-yo</i>	Don't drink (it).
た 食べるんじやねえよ	<i>taberu</i> <i>n-ja-nee-yo</i>	Don't eat (it).
わ 分かるんじやねえよ	<i>wakaru</i> <del><i>n-ja-nee-yo</i></del>	Don't understand!

Then, when you ask your teacher or language exchange partner lots of questions about this construction, you will start to get a feel for how it's used and when it's appropriate. I'm guessing that most teachers will be like, "Don't use this grammar! It's rude." But if you go live in Japan, then you'll probably hear your (male) friends use it from time to time. So just keep pushing when teachers and friends resist explaining. You might also get them to explain that 分かるんじやねえよ, shown above, is wrong... mostly because it just sounds strange to tell someone, "Don't understand!" as an order. You don't really give negative commands using verbs that express an action of one's own will. It's the same in English.

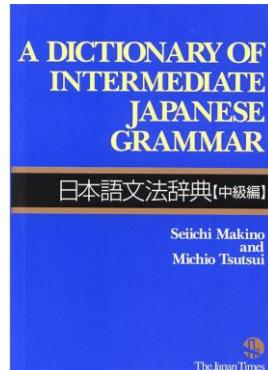
If you went through this whole process, I'm pretty sure that you would be comfortable using this sentence construction in the future, and you would understand it each time it was used in a conversation. This is what I'm referring to when I say that we need to clean up our grammar in Phase #4.

Ideally, you want to be able to create every grammar construction that appears in one of my favorite books, [A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar](#). Last time I checked, it wasn't available on Amazon, but they do sell it [at White Rabbit Japan](#) (which is a pretty fun site for a Japanese-language nerd, by the way).

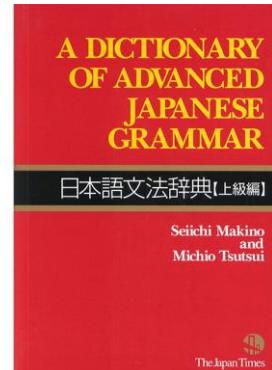
Once you get past all of the grammar in that monster of a text, you can level up to [A Dictionary of Intermediate Japanese Grammar](#). From there, you can move onto [A Dictionary of Advanced Japanese Grammar](#). Or you could take a less systematic approach and just learn whatever grammar you come across in your day-to-day studies.



White Rabbit Japan:  
<http://bit.ly/1DSjKKo>



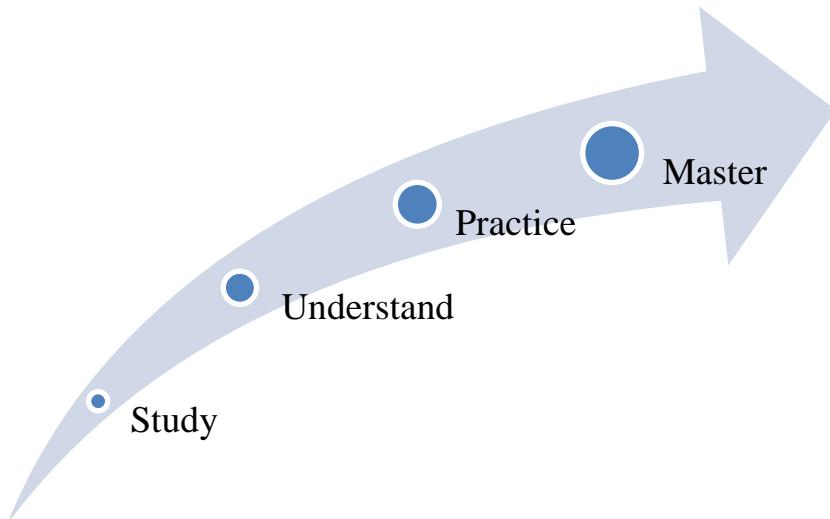
White Rabbit Japan:  
<http://bit.ly/1KY0IEy>



White Rabbit Japan:  
<http://bit.ly/1DSmqYw>

If you do decide to study using these books, I recommend also downloading [this shared Anki deck](#) in which someone has transcribed the 8,000+ example sentences that appear in those three books. People are amazing, right?

## Grammar Cleanup and Expansion



Just take it one sentence construction at a time, until you become a total Japanese grammar boss.

### *Focus Shift #2 – Give More Priority to Your Motivator*

For example, if you’re studying Japanese, because you want to speak lots of Japanese and get a Japanese-speaking job, then you should probably prioritize speaking practice more. Get on [italki](#) or [Cafetalk](#) and start taking those lessons. Get on [MyLanguageExchange](#) and start making those friends. Get money in your bank account so you can move to Japan already. Or, if your goal is to read lots of manga, then start reading lots of manga. Trudge through your first fifty books. Then somewhat enjoy the next fifty. Then breeze through the next fifty.

I keep saying that studying should be enjoyable, right? Well Phase #4 is your chance to make it even more enjoyable.

That thing you love? Go do it... in Japanese.

### *Focus Shift #3 – Take the All-Japanese Plunge*

If we’re in Phase #4, then you’re already pretty good at Japanese. So come on, already! It’s time to take the all-Japanese plunge. All books, all TV shows, all movies, all websites, all conversations with your cat, all thoughts in your head—make all that stuff Japanese.

If it’s Phase #4, and you’re still not totally immersed in Japanese, you’ve been easing into these cold waters for far too long now. It’s time to finally dive in. The water is going to be very cold. And you will probably feel like it’s too cold to bear, like you’ll never get used to it. Just be patient and give it time, though. Immersion will not feel tiring after you get through the grueling initial phases.

For some tips on how to immerse yourself in Japanese, please see [the immersion section](#) above.

## Keeping a Journal in Japanese

On November 13, 2012 I started keeping a very specific type of journal. **I write one short entry for every single day**, and each entry starts like this:

*The best thing that happened today was when...*

The original idea was that it might be a good way for me to remember all of the small and beautiful things that make up this thing we call life. Some days I had really good, positive entries. Other days, “the best thing” was something small—a delicious cup of coffee, a text from a loved one, a 15-minute nap.

Starting that journal was one of the best things that I have ever done, and **I've written in it almost every single day since then**. When I'm feeling bored or sad, I can scroll through it and recall good memory after good memory after good memory. Also, it helps me to pay more attention to what I'm doing with my life and what is making me happy. Writing that journal helped me realize that the things that truly make me happy are usually small. I'd say that food and moments with loved ones probably make up for about 90% of the entries. Reading back over them, I can't help but reassess what I'm doing with my life (or trying to do with my life), because I really consider the things that bring me happiness.

On March 25, 2013 I started writing this journal in Japanese. And since then, every entry starts with:

きょう いちばんよ こと …  
今日の一番良かつた事は…

At first, it was quite tiring writing each entry in Japanese. Also, I felt like I couldn't convey how I really felt about the things I was trying to describe. Now, though, hundreds of entries later, I don't even really have to think about how to convey those feelings, about how to form the sentences. **Writing in Japanese feels natural now.**

I only write a couple of sentences per day. Sometimes just one sentence. “The best thing that happened today was when... I had a beer after work.” Or something like that. But those sentences really added up over time, and I think that they helped to improve my Japanese quite a bit (especially when I had a Japanese person proofread entries).

The key point that I want to convey here is that I was able to practice writing Japanese every single day for hundreds of days in a row, because **I linked it to an activity that I find intrinsically valuable and uplifting**. If possible, try to find activities like this that you truly enjoy and merge them with your Japanese practice. Immersion does not have to be a 100% painful experience.

#### *Focus Shift #4 – Go to Japan*

I mean, why not, yeah? I don’t think that a person needs to live in Japan in order to master Japanese. However, I think that it would be a bit naïve to claim that living in Japan has no benefit whatsoever. Living there, you have such a wide array of study resources everywhere you turn.

Planning a trip to Japan—or, for you more adventurous kids, planning an extended stay in Japan—can be a great motivator for your studying and a great way to reward yourself for all of the hard work that you’ve done.

#### *Focus Shift #5 – Set New Goals*

I don’t really like using the word “goal,” because I personally hate goals. They stress me out.

I do like the idea of being excited about something that’s in the future, though. And sometimes that something is a challenge—like the JLPT, or my first novel in Japanese, or 1 full day without a single word of English.

For lack of a better word, though, I’ll say “goal.” Set some new goals. Goals that excite you. And, most importantly, goals that are measurable. Or not. Whatever.

I think that I’ve laid out some clear-cut guideposts for the first year of studies, but after

that it's largely going to be up to you, because reaching an intermediate or upper-intermediate level of Japanese will open up a countless number of study options. Reaching higher levels gives you so much freedom. Embrace it by setting goals that excite you, striving for them, and mastering this beautiful language.

## Wrapping Up

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That's all we've got for Phase #4. This is when you free yourself from instructions. Have fun learning Japanese, friend.

## *Phase #4 – Checklist (Week #53 – ∞)*

**Purpose:** Clean up and expand upon skills and knowledge acquired in Phases #1-3.

Immerse yourself in Japanese. Start taking control of your study approach and goals.

**Time to Complete:** ∞

### **Completely Immerse Your Technology in Japanese**

- Set your PC's operating system to Japanese.
- Set your phone's language to Japanese.
- Japanify your web browser.
- Get more Japanese in your Facebook feed.
- Get more Japanese in your Twitter feed.
- Try to watch only Japanese videos on YouTube.
- Get more Japanese in your email inbox.

### **Completely Immerse Your Entertainment in Japanese**

- Listen to lots of Japanese music.
- Watch lots of Japanese TV shows.
- Read lots of Japanese manga and books.

### **Shift Your Study Focus**

- Continue and improve upon Year 1 studying.
- Give more priority to your motivator(s).
- Take the all-Japanese plunge.
- Go to Japan (optional).
- Set new goals (optional).

# GANBARISHARK

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You now know everything that lies between you and total Japanese mastery. This marks the close of the core [NihongoShark.com](http://NihongoShark.com) study system. There is still a lot more content that I'm going to introduce, such as studying through media (specifically, books, DVDs, anime, and video games) and JLPT preparation guidance. Also, the Caveman Conversation Guide is at the end of this book. The core study system, however, is complete:

- ✓ Phase #1 – Prep Your Ninja Tools (Week #1)
- ✓ Phase #2 – Prep Your Ninja Brain (Months #1-4)
- ✓ Phase #3 – Lay Your Fluency Foundation (Months #5-12)
- ✓ Phase #4 – Go Jouzu! (Months 13+)

In this section, I'll give you some small bits of advice on diving into the practice of the study principles described above, a few motivational snippets, and then the rest will be up to you. I can't teach you Japanese. No one can. I can only teach you *how to learn* Japanese. The bad news? That means a lot of work for you. The good news? There's nothing stopping you from progressing towards Japanese mastery!

## Getting Organized

---

Here is a brief overview of every checklist and daily study plan. There is so much information in this book that it can be very easy to get distracted thinking about Japanese, when really you need to be interacting with the language itself. Use these checklists and daily study plans as a guide and reminder for productive studying.

## Phase #1 – Checklist (Week #1)

**Purpose:** Prepare Your Ninja Tools for Accelerated Japanese Learning

**Time to Complete:** 1 Week

### **Mindset Prep:**

- Cultivate a Growth Mindset (i.e., Have Faith in Your Success)
- Commit to Long-Term Study
- Mentally Prepare Yourself for Future Setbacks
- Pick Your Holy Habit Time
  - ❖ Identify the Cue, Routine, and Reward
- Conserve Willpower
- Identify Barriers to Consistent Studying and Systematically Eliminate Them
- Create an Accountability System (Optional)

### **Vocab Prep:**

- Download or Bookmark an App or Program for Learning Hiragana and Katakana (Ninja Tool #1)
- Download Anki (Ninja Tool #2)
- Purchase *Remembering the Kanji* (Optional) (Ninja Tool #3)
- Bookmark Reviewing the Kanji (Ninja Tool #4)

### **Listening Prep**

- Sign Up for JapanesePod101 (or Other Audio Lessons) (Ninja Tool #5)

### **Reference Prep**

- Set Up Your Computer to Read Japanese Characters (Ninja Tool #6)
- Bookmark Awesome Online Dictionaries (Ninja Tool #7)
- Install Awesome Web Browser Plugins (Ninja Tool #8)
- Download Awesome Smartphone Apps (Ninja Tool #9)

### **Grammar Prep**

- Choose and Purchase (Optional) Your Preferred Series of Grammar Books (Ninja Tool #10)

### **Speaking Prep**

- Download the Caveman Conversation Course (Included) (Ninja Tool #11)
- Create an Account for Taking Online Japanese Lessons (Ninja Tool #12)
- Create an Account for Japanese Language Exchange (Optional) (Ninja Tool #13)
- High Five Yourself

## *Phase #2 – Checklist (Week #2 – Week #16)*

**Purpose:** Learn to Read and Pronounce Japanese Characters

**Time to Complete:** 15 Weeks (3.5 Months)

### **Ninja Brain Prep #1 – Learn Japanese Pronunciation**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 30 Minutes)*

- Read the Pronouncing Japanese section a few times.
- Keep that information in mind as you proceed to Brain Prep #2.

### **Ninja Brain Prep #2 – Learn Hiragana & Katakana**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 1 Week)*

- Get a free app or program for learning hiragana and katakana.
- Learn the reading and pronunciation of every single character.
- Learn to write the characters (recommended, but you don't really need to if you don't feel like it; personally, I *never* handwrite any Japanese).
- Keep using your chosen app or program every single day until you know all of the characters like the back of your hand.

### **Ninja Brain Prep #3 – Learn All 2,136 Joyo Kanji**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 97 Days)*

- Download Anki.
- Download the Nihongoshark.com Kanji Deck.
- Set Anki's preferences.
- Start learning new kanji.
- Repeat new-kanji-learning process 2,131 times.
- Review kanji flashcards every day.

## *Phase #3 – Checklist (Week #17 – Week #52)*

**Purpose:** Build a Foundation of Grammar, Vocabulary, and Speaking Skills

**Time to Complete:** 35 Weeks (~8 Months)

### **Daily Study Chain Prep**

- Go online and find a monthly or yearly calendar that you like the look of.
- Print it out.
- Buy or set aside two colored markers: Blue and Red; or Your Favorite Color and Your Most Hated Color; any two colors.
- Start marking (Blue) X's on days that you study all three chain items, (Red) X's the first time you miss one or more chain items, and No X's every time you go two or more days without studying all three chain items (Hint: This should never happen).

### **Daily Chain Item #1 – Flashcards**

- Download the Blank NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck.
- When you encounter new words in your studies, add them to your deck (either manually or using EPWing2Anki).
- Download the Pre-Loaded NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck.

### **Daily Chain Item #2 – Listening Practice**

- Remove barriers to listening practice.
- Put audio lessons onto your phone, mp3 player, PC, Xbox, CDs—Everywhere!

### **Daily Chain Item #3 – Grammar and Speaking Practice**

- On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.
- On Day #1-7 of Phase #3, plow through the Caveman Conversation Course.
- On Day #7, take your first (online) Japanese lesson.
- Schedule your second (online) Japanese lesson.

## Daily Chain Process

There are 3 items in the Daily Study Chain.

- When you do all 3 items, you can put a Blue X on your study chain calendar.
- If you miss one or more items one day, you can only put a Red X on your calendar.
- If you miss one or more items two or more days in a row, you cannot put any X's.

### 1. Flashcards

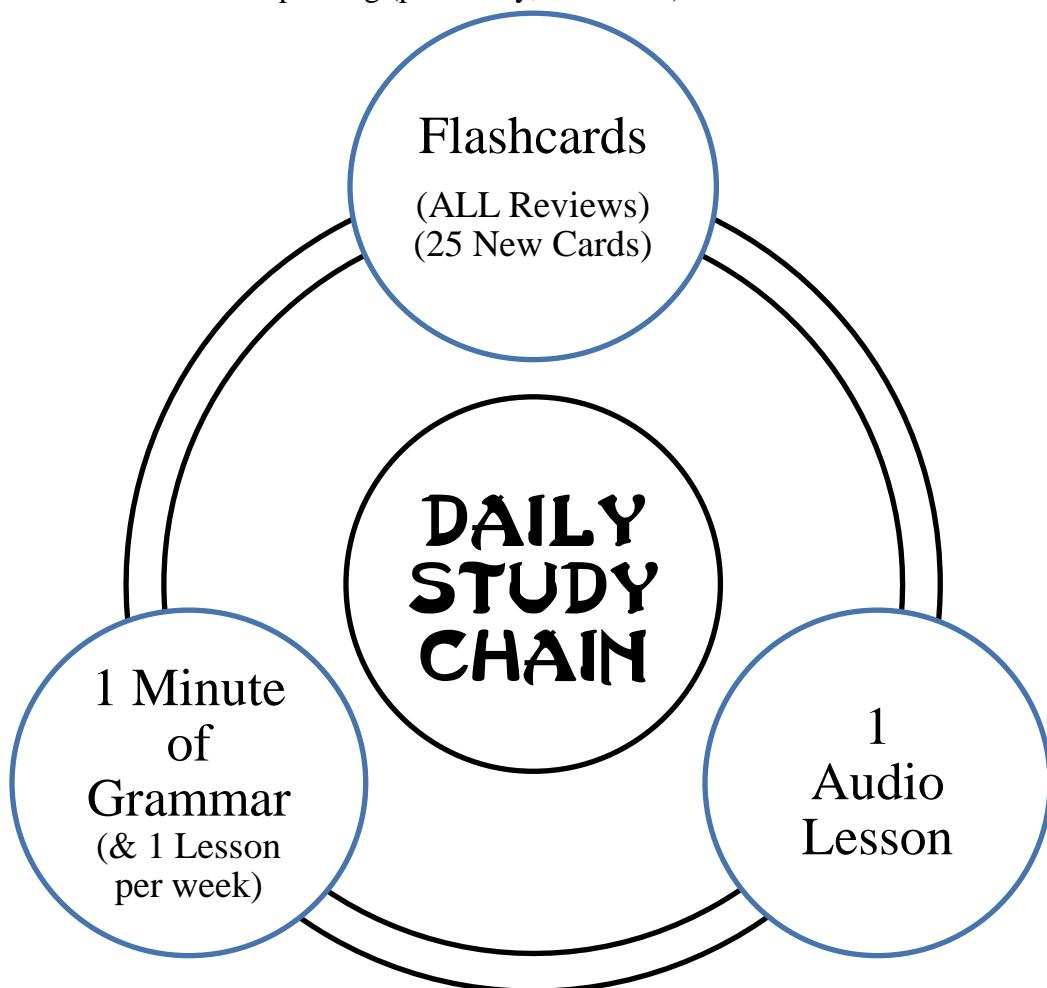
- ✧ Study ALL of your Review Cards every day.
- ✧ Study 25 New Cards every day.

### 2. Listening

- ✧ Listen to at least 1 audio lesson every day.

### 3. Grammar & Speaking

- ✧ Study grammar at least 1 minute per day.
- ✧ Practice speaking (preferably, in lessons) at least once a week.



## *Phase #4 – Checklist (Week #53 – ∞)*

**Purpose:** Clean up and expand upon skills and knowledge acquired in Phases #1-3.

Immerse yourself in Japanese. Start taking control of your study approach and goals.

**Time to Complete:** ∞

### **Completely Immerse Your Technology in Japanese**

- Set your PC's operating system to Japanese.
- Set your phone's language to Japanese.
- Japanify your web browser.
- Get more Japanese in your Facebook feed.
- Get more Japanese in your Twitter feed.
- Try to watch only Japanese videos on YouTube.
- Get more Japanese in your email inbox.

### **Completely Immerse Your Entertainment in Japanese**

- Listen to lots of Japanese music.
- Watch lots of Japanese TV shows.
- Read lots of Japanese manga and books.

### **Shift Your Study Focus**

- Continue and improve upon Year 1 studying.
- Give more priority to your motivator(s).
- Take the all-Japanese plunge.
- Go to Japan (optional).
- Set new goals (optional).

## Staying Motivated

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As you're likely already thinking, looking at that giant list I just threw at you, this is going to be a ton of work. But honestly, I know you can do this. What I've come to realize over time is that learning a language isn't about being smart or not being smart. Instead, learning a language is requires motivation, discipline, and a systematic approach.

### **Discipline is greatness.**

Smart people don't learn languages. Only disciplined people do. And discipline is not a talent, is not something you're born with. Discipline is a skill. And since it's a skill, it can—like all skills—be learned. For me, discipline is nothing more than putting future wants ahead of immediate wants. What do I want more: To watch a TV show I've already seen or to be fluent in Japanese? If only it were that simple, right? Well, discipline is just about brainwashing yourself into believing that it really is that simple. I cannot think: Do I want to go for a run or do I want to sit here? Instead, I must think: Do I want to be in shape or do I want to sit here?

### **Motivation and systems make discipline easy.**

By changing our mindsets, building habits, and managing our time efficiently, discipline becomes much easier. When we combine our disciplined approach with a precise study system, we accelerate learning, which motivates us more, and we build a finer-tuned study system that is integrated with routines that mesh well with our lifestyles, thus limiting the amount of willpower and discipline required master Japanese.

You can do this. I promise you.

Keep swimming.

Finally, I have one last task for you...

# Get Started!

---

Let's get to it, yo!

## *Dive In*

Reading instructions on how to learn Japanese can only get you so far. **The best way to figure your ideal study method is to start studying.** Start taking lessons. Start reading books. Start doing something that puts Japanese in your brain. Then, when you run into trouble, come back to the explanations (e.g. this guide), read up on study tactics and all that glorious stuff, and then dive back in with more efficiency and precision than before.

Japanese will feel more intimidating on some days than others, but the truth is that Day #1 is the hardest. Day #1 is when you know the least Japanese. Day #1 is when you really have no idea what you're doing or trying to do, let alone how to do it.

Let's get Day #1 out of the way. Then Month #1. Then Year #1. In order to do that, we have to start (or start over).

## *Don't Be Active, Be Productive*

As you set off on this adventure, please try to keep in mind what I said in Phase #1 about the difference between being active and being productive.

### **Being Active:**

- Reading study guides like this one.
- Calculating how many hours you need to study Japanese.
- Thinking about how badly you want to learn Japanese.
- Talking to other people about how you're trying to learn Japanese.
- Surfing the internet for new study tips and tricks.
- Researching Japanese language schools and lessons.

### **Being Productive:**

- Taking an online lesson.
- Studying Japanese flashcards.
- Reading a Japanese grammar book.

- Emailing a language exchange partner.
- Writing a Japanese blog post on Lang-8.
- Doing Japanese workbook activities.
- Listening to an audio lesson.
- Reading a book in Japanese that is appropriate for your level.
- Watching a show, movie, or video in Japanese that is appropriate for your level.

The more you are productive, the faster you will learn. Being active, while potentially beneficial, is often just procrastination in disguise.

## Being Productive > Being Active

Always, Always, Always.

*Just. Don't. Quit.*

Let's not forget about this:

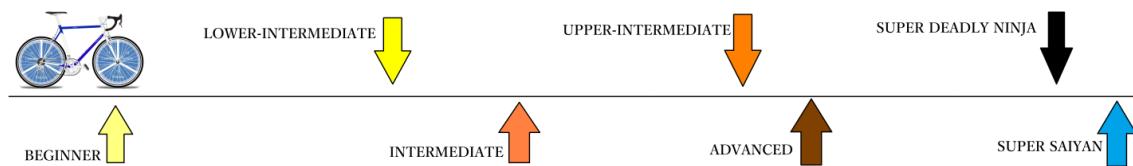


We put wheels like this on our study bike:

## N~3000 SUPER STUDY BIKE



And as long as we keep those wheels turning, we are *guaranteed* to master Japanese:



It's nothing more than a math problem. **If you study efficiently and consistently over a long period of time, you will *definitely* learn Japanese.** It's not a race. It's an endurance test.

### *Crash, Burn, and Start Over*

Unless you're some kind of superhuman, **you're going to fail at this at least once.** And if you're anything like me, you're going to fail at it about a hundred times.

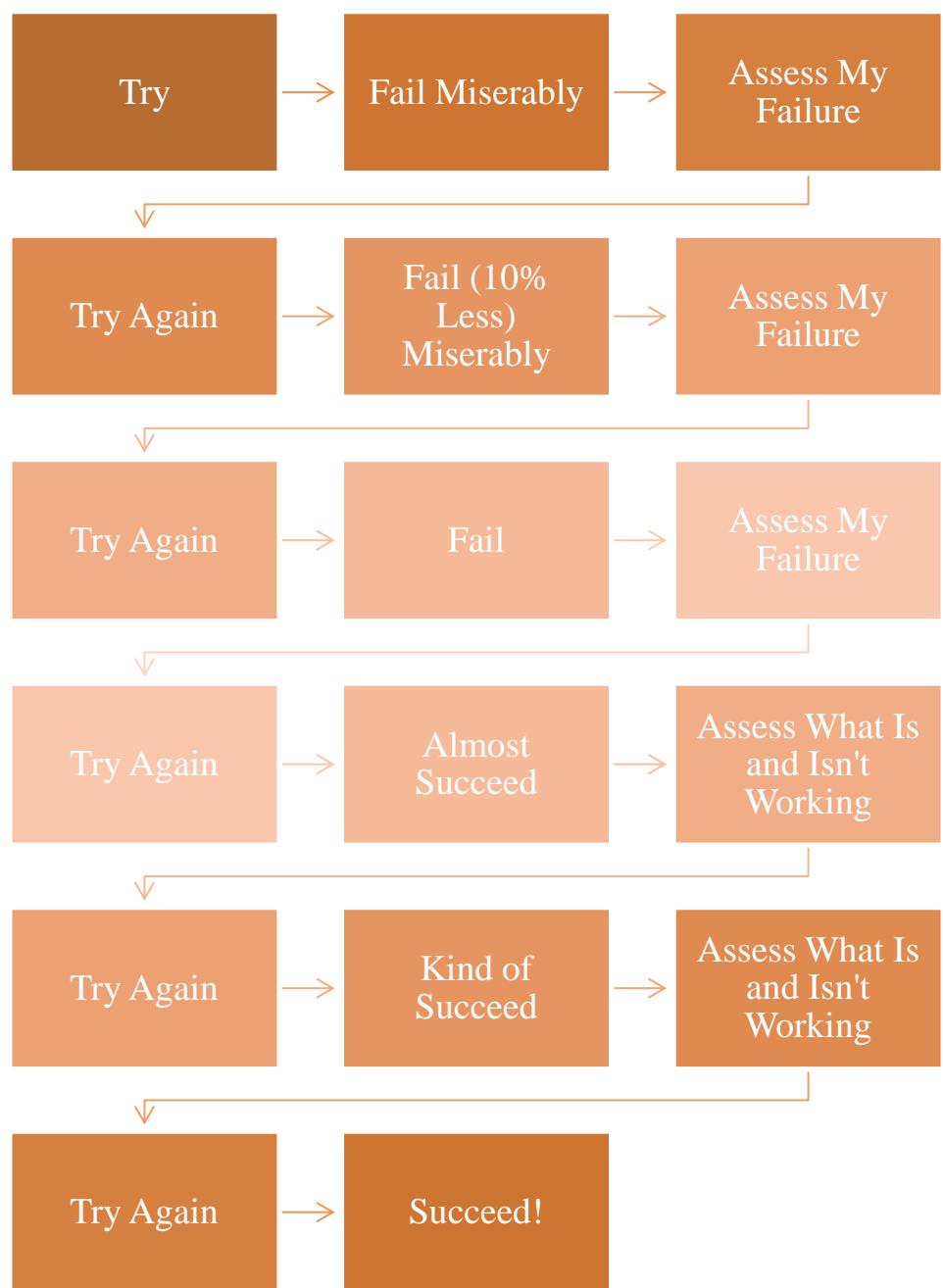
That's OK.

When we do fail, we can give ourselves the Failure Review Interview. It is essentially just

a list of questions that you can ask yourself when you run into trouble sticking to your studies, reaching your goals, and all that stressful business.

#### **Failure Review Interview:**

- ✧ What did I fail to do?
- ✧ How realistic was my goal? Was it doomed from the start?
- ✧ How can I rework this goal to make it achievable?
- ✧ Why, specifically, did I fail? Lack of time? Lack of motivation? Lack of direction?
- ✧ What were the barriers to achieving this goal?
- ✧ How can I remove these barriers?
- ✧ What is my motivation?
- ✧ What are my habits?
- ✧ How long do I plan to keep feeling sorry for myself?
- ✧ How long do I plan to keep making excuses?
- ✧ Considering all of these things, how am I going to alter my next attempt?
- ✧ How can I guarantee to be at least 10% more successful in my next attempt?
- ✧ All set? Well, what am I waiting for?



*Swim, swim, swim.*



You are crossing an ocean.

# MORE NINJA POWER-UP TOOLS

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Although the 1-Year Mastery Plan does not include these tools and resources, I think they might prove useful for (1) people who want to try out different study methods and (2) people who have already completed Phases #1-3.

## How to Increase Vocabulary Through Reading

---



I quit watching TV about 5 years ago, and it has changed my life immensely for the better. At the beginning of that five year span, I used to read a lot of books in English. But then, in January 2013, I decided to quit reading books in English—if I wanted to read a book, it had to be in a foreign language, namely Japanese (but sometimes Spanish).

Now, this was *painful*. I love reading. I was an English major in college. I used to read about one to two novels per week. And not only novels, I read books about marketing, web development, self-improvement—anything. But, yeah, I quit doing that in English. And I would have these urges to read something, but I wasn't allowed to read in English, so I would pick up a book in Japanese and... complete failure. This is partly because I was trying to study above my appropriate level.

Anyways, I'm getting sidetracked. Fast-forward a few years, and I actually *could* read books in Japanese. Yay! When I want to relax, I pick up a book in Japanese. It's become a kind of habit. When I can't fall asleep at night, I pick up a book in Japanese. Japanese audiobooks work nicely for this, too.

### *To Flashcard, or Not to Flashcard?*

Ideally, we should be adding every single new word that we encounter to [our personal vocabulary decks](#). That sounds super ideal, but in practice it can be quite exhausting, especially if you're reading some difficult material.

I like to take a more laidback approach to reading, as I want it to be an entertaining form of language exposure. Sometimes I'll make flashcards. Sometimes I won't. Here are a few options, though...

### *Using Kindle's Highlight Feature*

While I'm reading on my Kindle, I can highlight sentences that I want to add to my Anki flashcards later. I can then go online to [kindle.amazon.co.jp](https://kindle.amazon.co.jp). After logging in, I can click on the "Your Highlights" link at the top of the page:



This will take me to a page that lists all of my current highlights. They mostly consist of either (1) sentences that I thought sounded cool or (2) sentences with new words:



## Your Highlights (Most recently updated first)

**新世界より(上) (Japanese Edition)** by 貴志祐介

You have 4 highlighted passages

You have 0 notes

Last annotated on January 29, 2015

この日、わたしのチームは、序盤で犯したミスにより敗色濃厚だった。 [Read more at location 269](#) [Delete this highlight](#)

[Add a note](#)

「ねえ。もう、帰らなきゃ」 麗子が気を揉んだように言う。 [Read more at location 282](#) [Delete this highlight](#)

[Add a note](#)

初恋の思い出は、今なお夕陽のような光輝を放っている。 [Read more at location 311](#) [Delete this highlight](#)

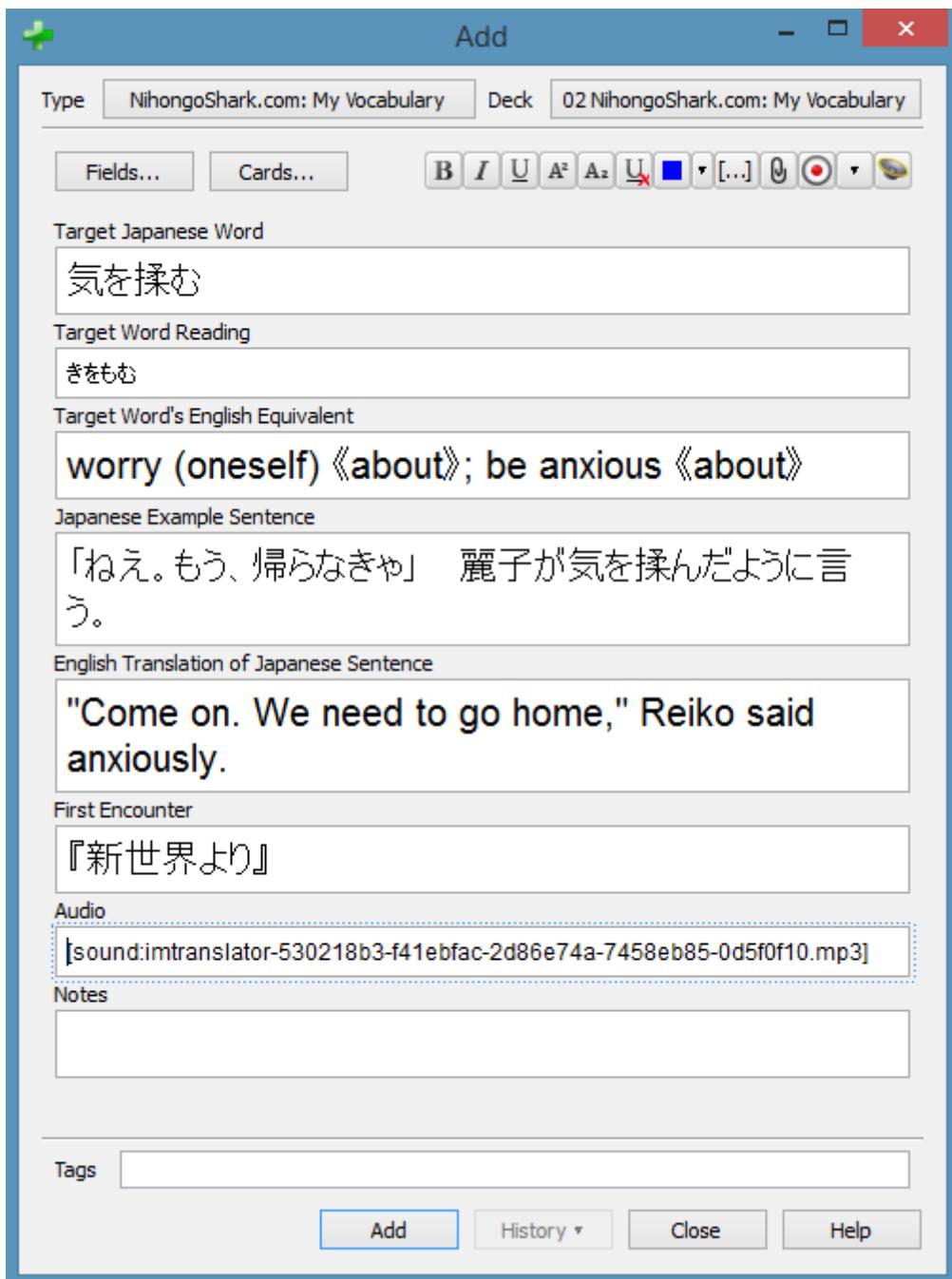
[Add a note](#)

魑魅魍魎が出てくる怖い話には目がなかったが、その中でも、ネコダマシはひどくぞっとさせられる存在だった。 [Read](#)

[Delete this highlight](#)

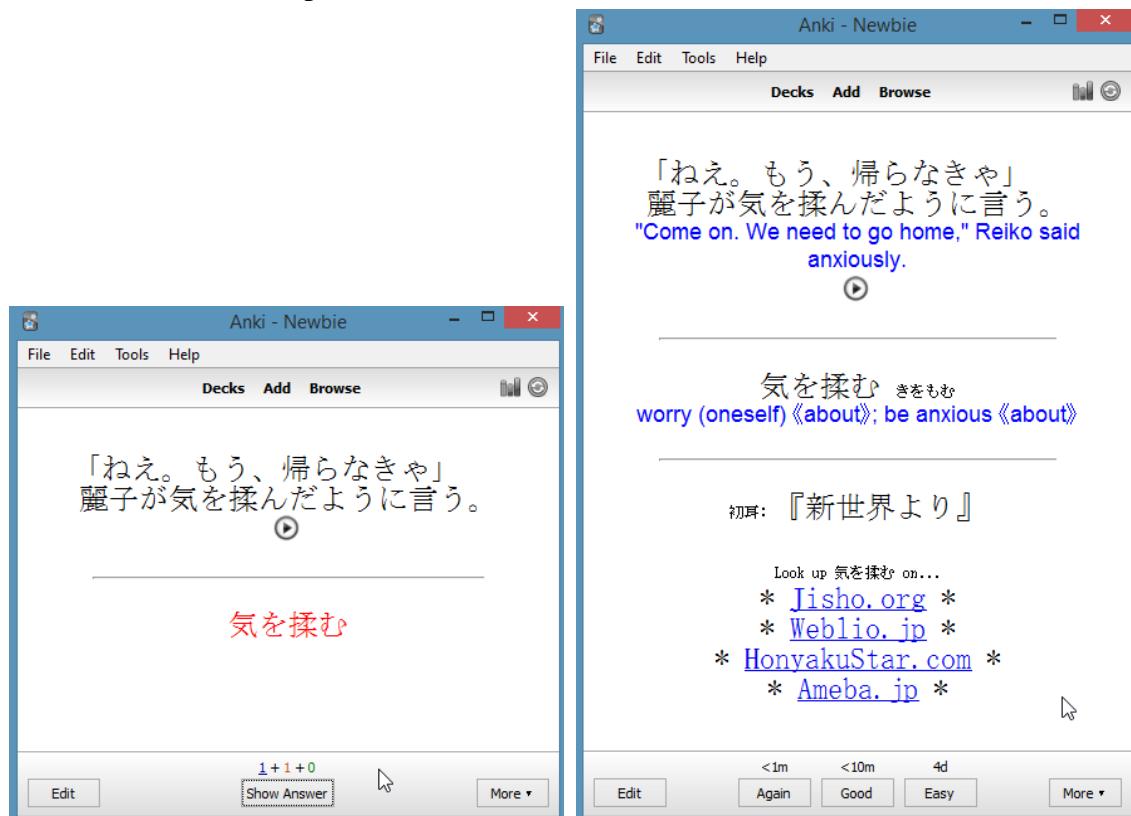
[Add a note](#)

I can then copy and paste these directly into my personal vocabulary deck on Anki, which I [talked about in Phase #3](#):



I can get the definition of the word that I want to learn (気を揉む) from [Weblio](#), like I [explained in Phase #1](#). Then I can automatically add a voice recording to the card with [AwesomeTTS](#), like I [explained in Phase #3](#). I also wrote an English translation for the sentence. The whole process takes me about 1 minute from start to finish. Obviously it will take longer than this when you're first starting, but you should be able to find a nice groove eventually.

Now I have this clean, pristine, relevant, and educational flashcard:



Thanks to Anki's super powers, I'm unlikely to ever forget this word again. And I'm especially likely to remember it if I keep on reading for fun every day, because it exposes me to such a ridiculously vast amount of Japanese words.

### *Bookmarking Words with Imi Wa?*

Sometimes while reading, if I see a word that I want to be able to use myself, I'll bookmark it in imi wa? so that I can import it into a flashcard deck using this method described in Phase #3.

### *The Do-Nothing Approach*

If I'm feeling lazy, then I just gloss over words that I don't understand. Or, I look up their definition, but I don't bookmark or highlight them, because I'm not interested in making flashcards for them.

This certainly isn't the ideal method for increasing my vocabulary through reading, but it's certainly better than doing nothing.

# Learning Japanese Through Anime—Is It Truly Possible?

There are some seriously exciting technological developments being made to streamline the study of languages through TV shows. Since a lot of us Japanese nerds tend to also be, well, nerds in general, we are at the forefront of this glorious movement.

I almost included this section of the guide much, much earlier. But honestly, I thought that it might be so exciting that you don't read anything else in this guide and just decide to study Japanese

through anime 100%. I guess that is technically an option. Though you might want to consider at least some of the stuff that I wrote in the 390+ pages leading up to the section on Anime.

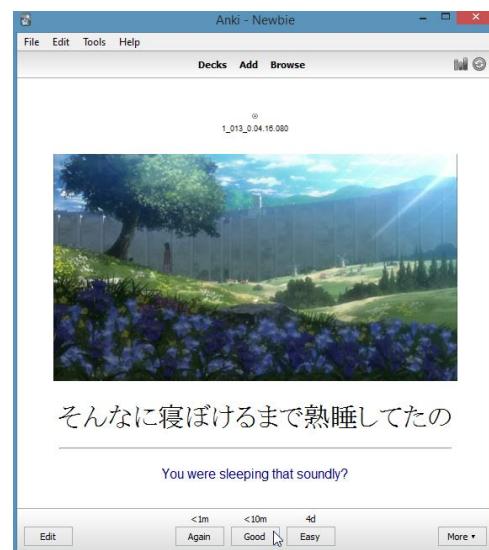
## *The Manga → Anime Approach*



The Manga → Anime approach to learning through anime is for all of you old-school productive kids. The majority of anime these days started as manga. As such, you could also say that the vast majority of anime have reading guides to accompany them.

Anime is much more difficult to understand than manga. The main issue here is speed. Anime doesn't give you the time to stop and analyze every single sentence that's being said. And you're probably just reading the English subtitles anyways, right? With manga, though, you can take your time, doing your best not to get totally burned out as you look up every single word that you come across, maybe even making flashcards for every single word you come across.

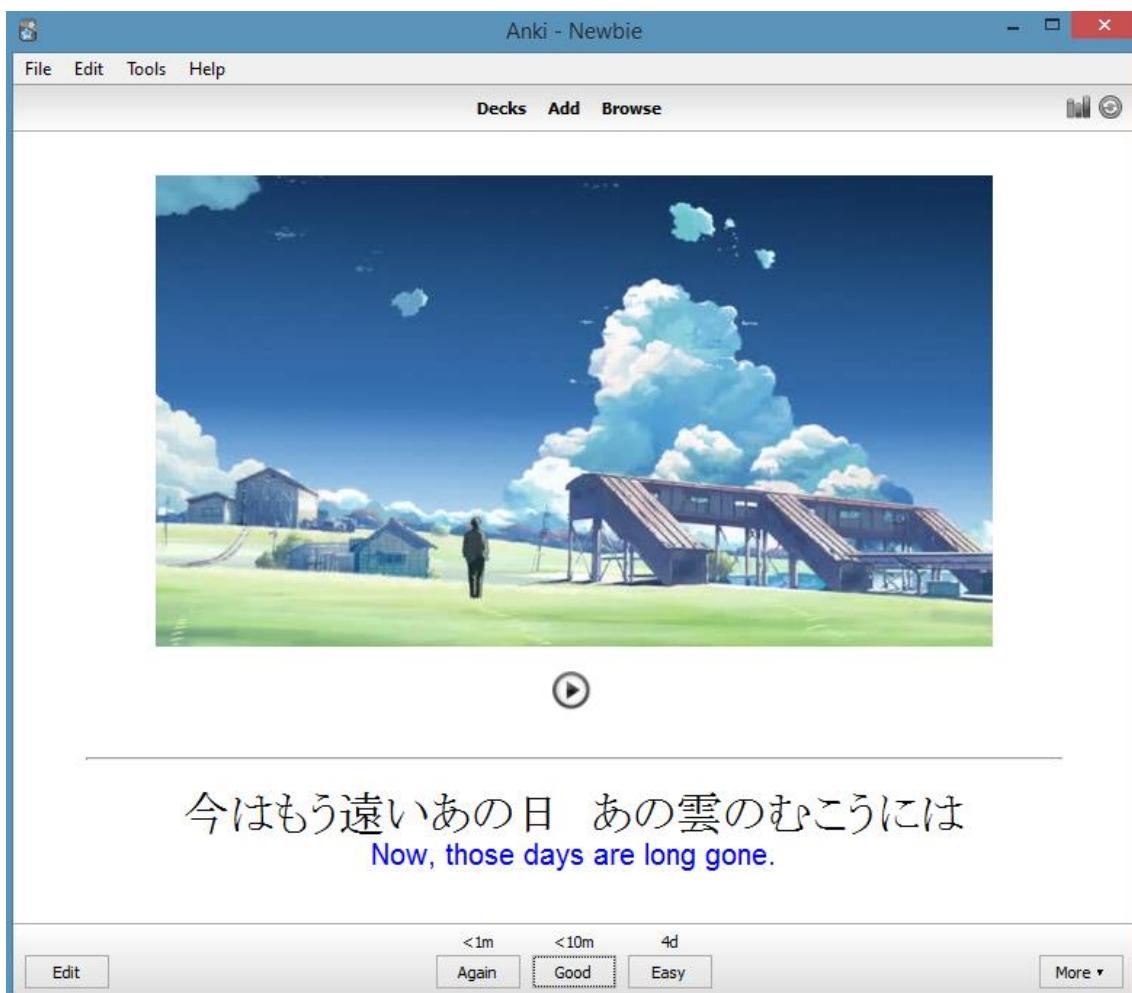
I've tried this process a few times, but I almost always get bored and quit after reading a few volumes. But then, I was never a huge manga fan to begin with. Usually when I



decided to read a manga and watch an anime alongside it, it was just because I wanted to find new and interesting ways to increase my Japanese ability. I didn't find it intrinsically interesting. **And anytime you don't find a study method intrinsically interesting, the odds of you giving up on it increase exponentially.**

There is still hope, though. I think a much more interesting, smoother approach is using anime only, an approach I'd like to describe for you now...

### *The Anime → Anki Approach*



What if I told you that you could *automatically* make Anki flashcards including audio, screenshots, video clips, Japanese subtitles, and English subtitles of your favorite anime shows? Because, uh, yeah... you can!

*Enter: subs2srs*

If you go to [this page](#), you can read all about a truly incredible program called subs2srs. I don't know who exactly developed this program, but it is awesome.

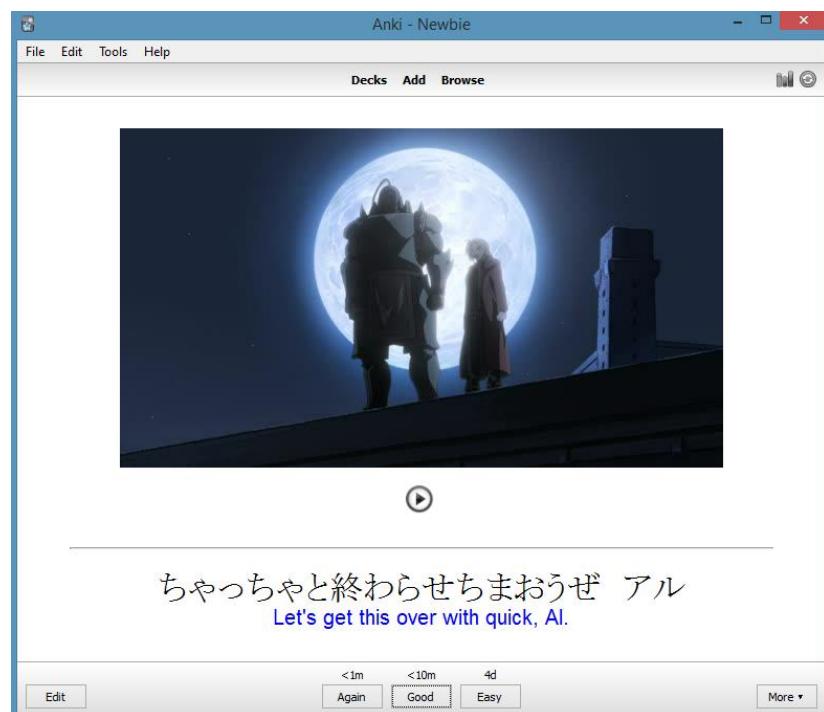
***subs2srs allows you to create import files for [Anki](#) or other Spaced Repetition Systems (SRS) based on your favorite foreign language movies and TV shows to aid in the language learning process.***

***This utility will parse through subtitle files, extract the dialog and timing information and then use that information to generate audio clips, snapshots and video clips for each line of dialog.***

- Description taken from the [subs2srs documentation page](#)

As far as I'm concerned, this program entirely destroys the "you can't learn Japanese from anime" argument. **You can learn Japanese from anime, because with this program you can systematically study every single sentence that shows up in an anime.**

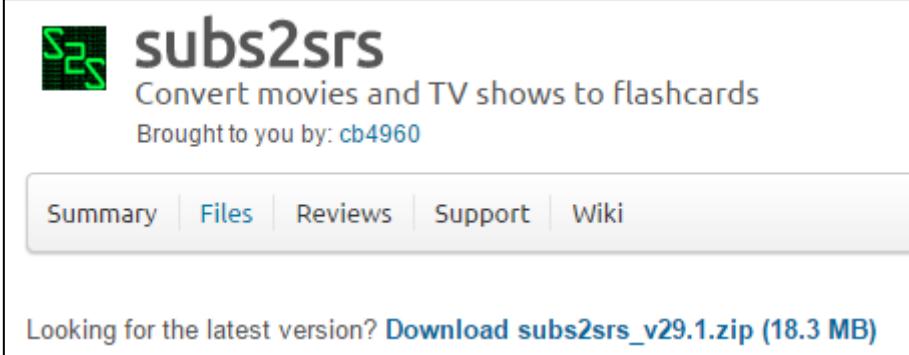
Here's an example of a flashcard that I created using this program, taken from the popular anime "Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood:"



Enough talking, though. Let's walk through an example of how to do this. I'll give step-by-step directions. Then, at the end of this section, I'll include some links to pre-made anime decks online.

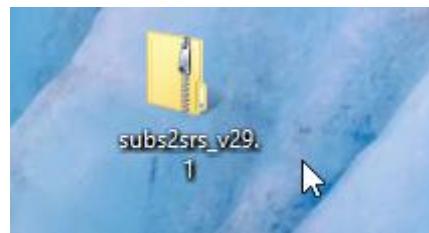
### *Using subs2srs*

Go to [this page](#) to download the subs2srs program:

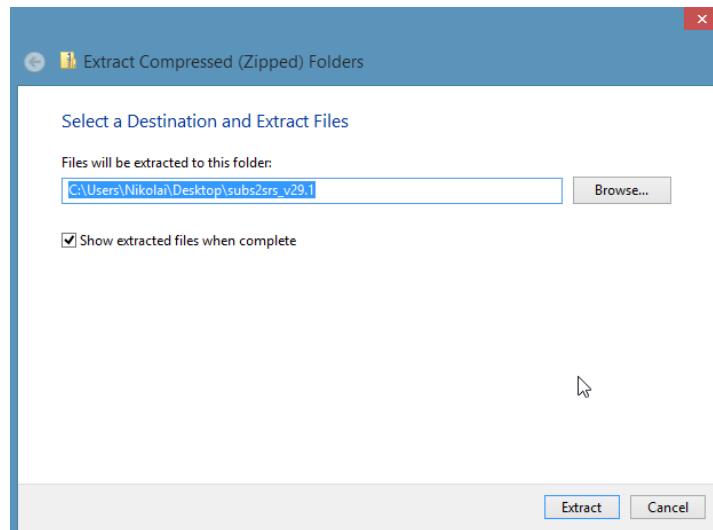


The screenshot shows the SourceForge project page for subs2srs. The page title is "subs2srs" with the subtitle "Convert movies and TV shows to Flashcards". It is noted that the project is "Brought to you by: cb4960". Below the title, there is a navigation bar with links for "Summary", "Files", "Reviews", "Support", and "Wiki". A prominent blue button at the bottom of the page says "Looking for the latest version? [Download subs2srs\\_v29.1.zip \(18.3 MB\)](#)".

By clicking the download link shown above, you can download a .zip file containing the program:



Then you can extract all of the files of that .zip file to a location on your system that you choose.



You'll also want to download one or more anime that *do NOT have subtitles hardcoded into them*. Here's my extracted subs2srs program next to a folder that contains Season 1

of the popular anime 進撃の巨人 / *Shingeki no Kyojin* / "Attack on Titan:"

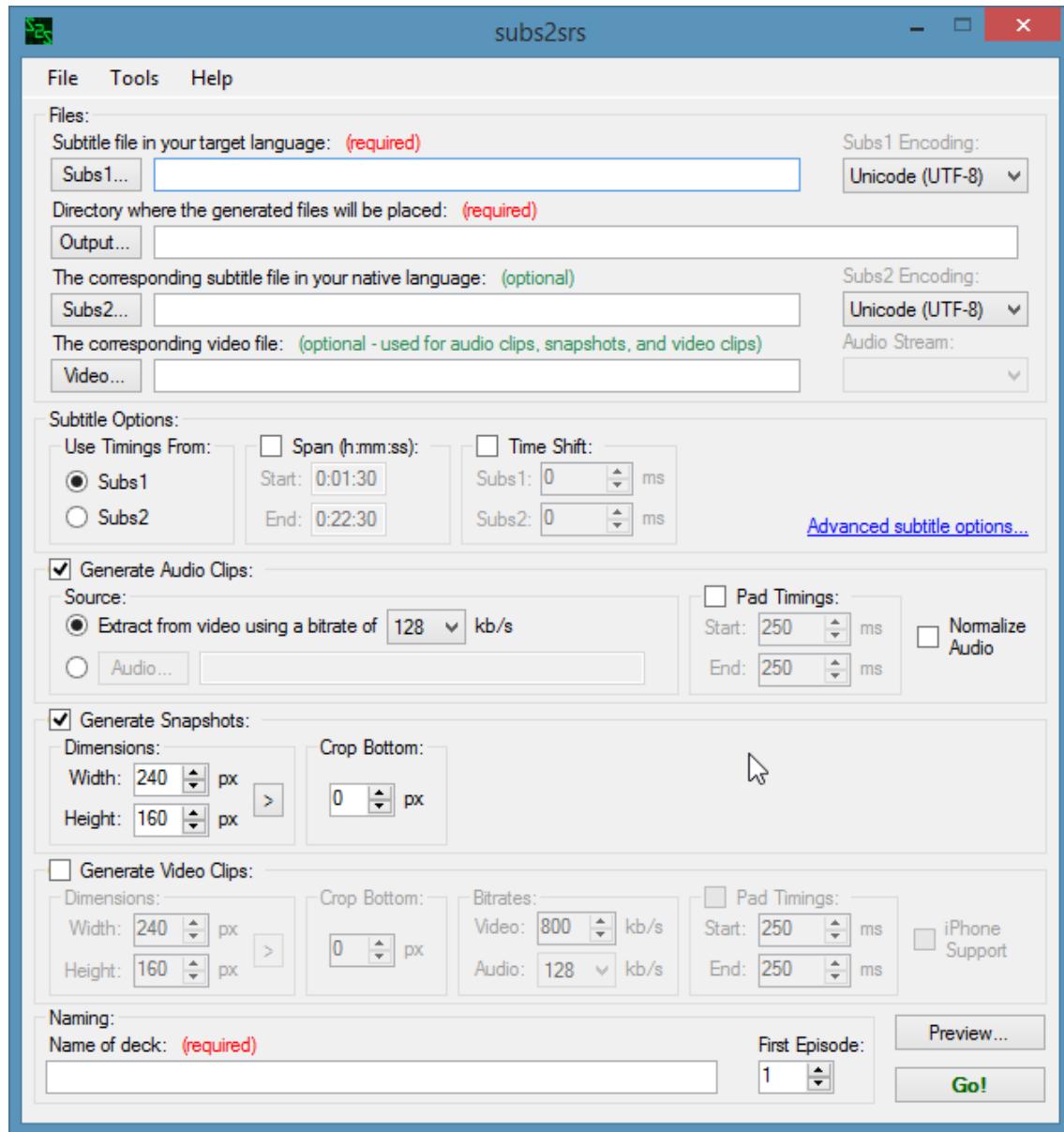


First, I'll open up the subs2srs folder:

Name	Date modified	Type	Size
Anki Deck Template	2015/02/11 17:10	File folder	
Logs	2015/02/11 17:11	File folder	
Utils	2015/02/11 17:10	File folder	
gpl	2015/02/11 17:10	OpenOffice.org 1....	35 KB
preferences	2015/02/11 17:10	OpenOffice.org 1....	5 KB
readme	2015/02/11 17:10	OpenOffice.org 1....	15 KB
<b>subs2srs</b>	2015/02/11 17:10	Application	630 KB
taglib-sharp.dll	2015/02/11 17:10	Application extens...	296 KB

I double-click on the subs2srs application in order to open the program, which looks like

this:



That might look like an intimidating array of options, but it's actually pretty easy to create your first flashcard deck. Let's just start at the top and work our way down. The first thing I need is the subtitle file in my target language (Japanese):



Only, I don't have the subtitle file! My life is ruined!

No, not really. Because we can just go find the file online. There are probably a number of sites for finding these, but so far the best one that I've found is [kitsunekko.net](http://kitsunekko.net). Calling this site simple would be a bit of an understatement. Here's the homepage:



Clicking on the “Japanese subtitles” link will take us to an alphabetical listing of subtitles available in Japanese:

The screenshot shows a list of Japanese subtitle files. Each file is listed with its name and the time since it was uploaded. A cursor is hovering over the "Akumaizer 3" entry.

File	Upload Date
.hack G.U	1 year
5-tou ni Naritai	1 year
07-Ghost	4 months
11eyes	1 year
Accel World	2 years
Acchi Kocchi	1 year
Ace Of Diamond	3 days
A Channel	2 years
Aikatsu!	6 days
Air	1 year
Ai Shite Knight	1 year
Akage no Anne	5 months
Akane-iro ni Somaru Saka	1 year
Akira	1 year
Akuma-kun	2 years
Akumaizer 3	8 months

We're looking for Shingeki no Kyojin / Attack on Titan. Scrolling down, I find it listed under “Shingeki no Kyojin:”

The screenshot shows a list of subtitle files for Shingeki no Kyojin. Each file is listed with its name and the time since it was uploaded. A cursor is hovering over the "Shingeki no Kyojin" entry.

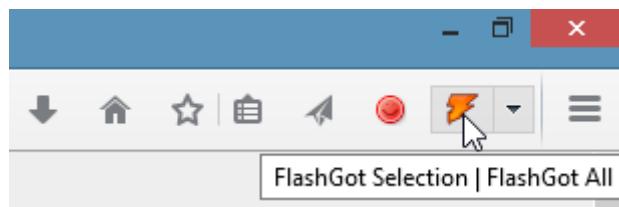
File	Upload Date
Shigatsu Wa Kimi No Uso	6 days
Shigofumi	2 years
Shiki	2 years
Shingeki no Kyojin	3 months
Shingetsutan Tsukihime	2 years
Shinigami no Ballad	1 year
Shinrei Tantei Yakumo	2 years
Shinryaku! Ika Musume S2	2 years

Clicking it will take me to a list of available subtitles:

Sort by: File↑ Size Date

[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - #3.25 OAD2 [1024x576 x264 AAC Sub(CN,JP)].ass	59 KB	4 months
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 01 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(Chi,Jap)].ass	53 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 02 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)].ass	52 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 03 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)].ass	60 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 03.5 OAD [DVD 848x480 x264 AAC Sub(Chs,Cht,Jap)].ass	78 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 04 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)].ass	57 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 05 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)](1).ass	54 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 05 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)](2).ass	54 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 05 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)](3).ass	54 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 05 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)](4).ass	54 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 05 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)].ass	54 KB	1 year
[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - 06 [1280x720 x264 AAC Sub(GB,Big5,Jap)].ass	54 KB	1 year

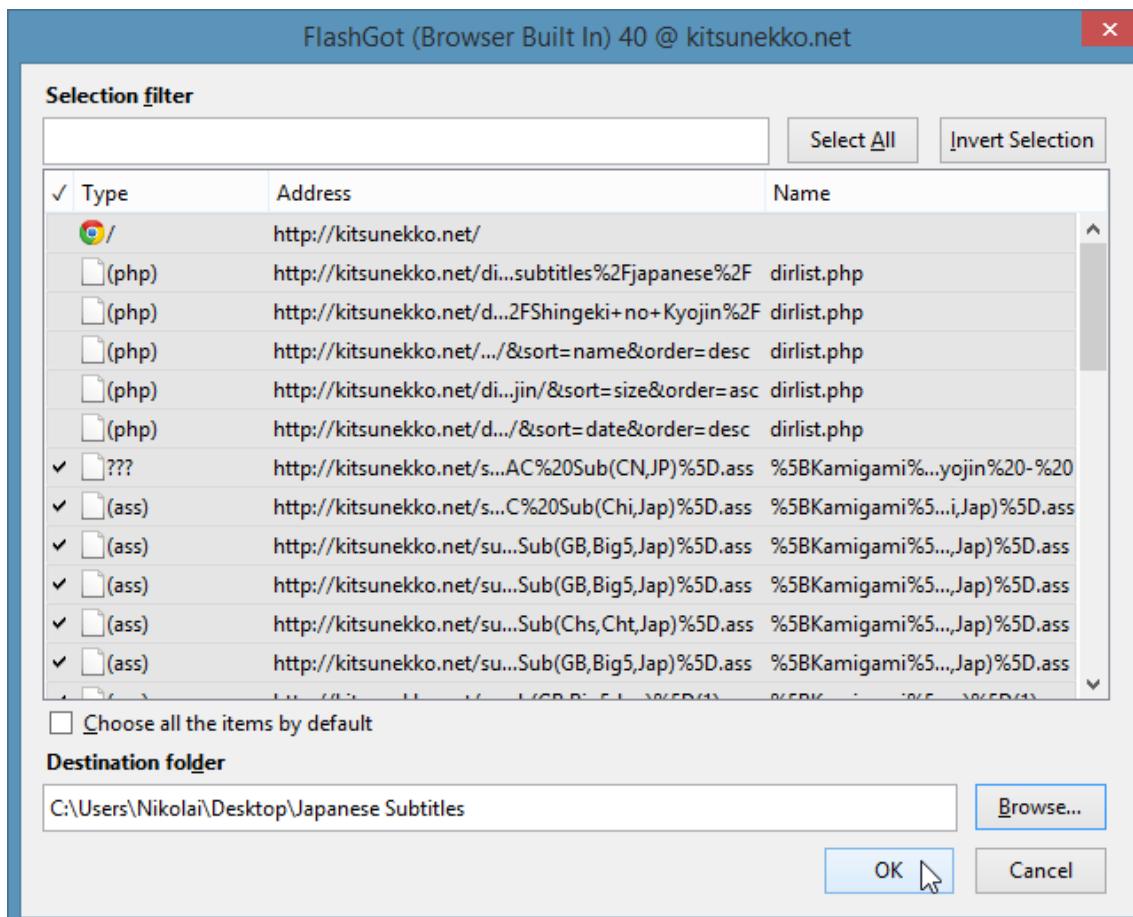
Luckily, they seem to have them for every episode. I could download each one individually. Instead, though, I'm going to use the [FlashGot Add-On](#) that I have installed on my Firefox browser to download them all at once:



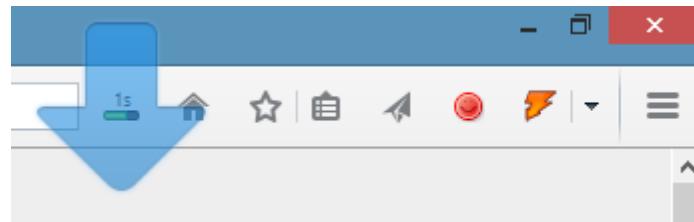
Just before I click the FlashGot Lightning Bolt shown above, I create an empty folder to put my subtitles in:



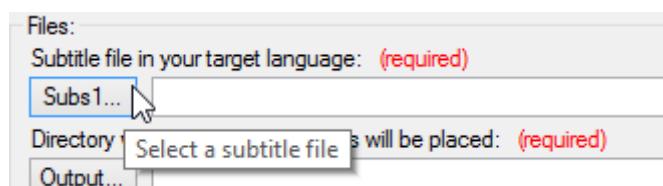
Then I go ahead and click the lightning bolt, which will bring up a download dialog:



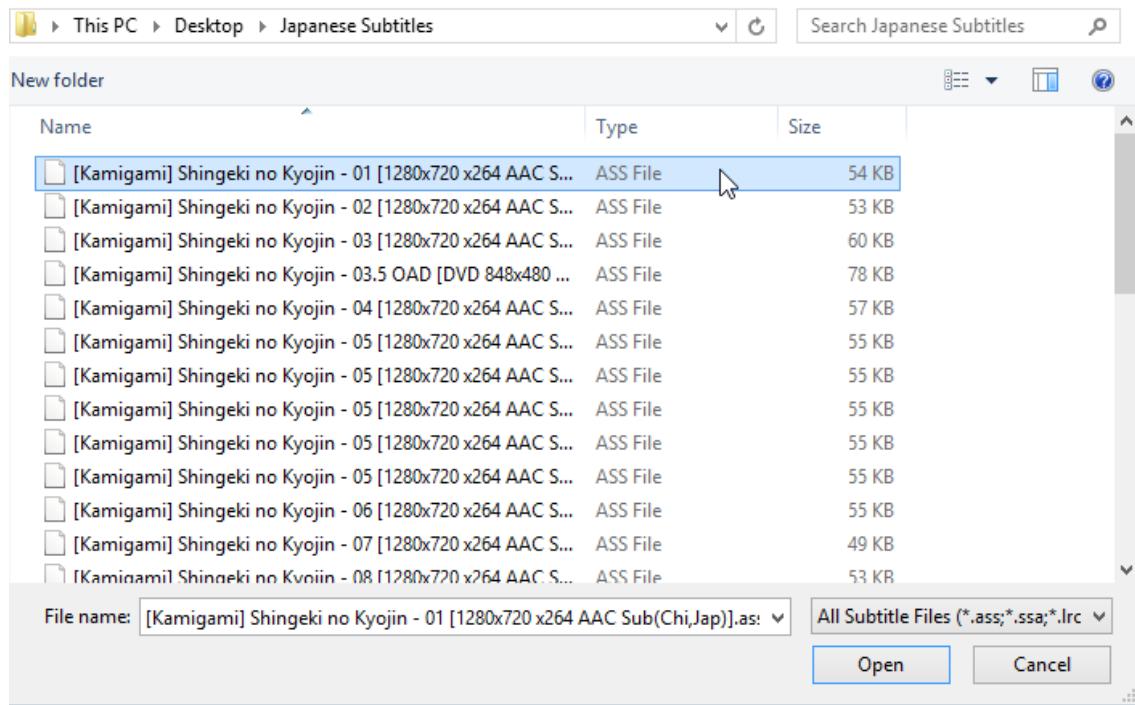
It would seem that Flashgot is a genius, as it has automatically selected all of the subtitle files. I click OK, and then they are all downloaded to the Destination folder (that I just created). A blue arrow pops up at the top of my browser every time Flashgot finishes downloading a file (about once every second or two):



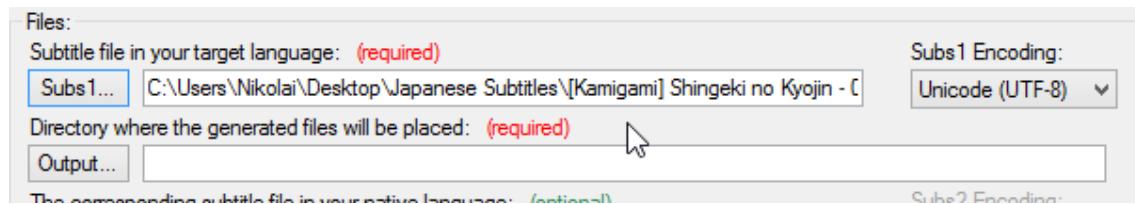
Once all of these are downloaded, I can go back to my subs2srs program and choose the Japanese subtitle file:



Let's start with Episode 01:



Clicking "Open," will set the directory for my subtitle file:



Now the next item is the directory where the generated files will be placed. In other words, I need to specify where this new deck should be sent to once it's generated. Let's create a new folder called Anime Anki Decks:



I'll go ahead and set that as the location for my generated file:

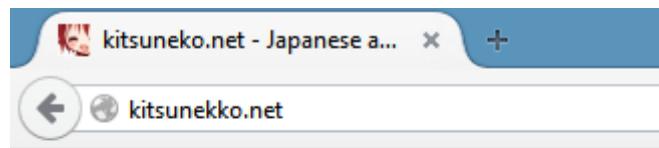
Files:

Subtitle file in your target language: **(required)**

Directory where the generated files will be placed: **(required)**

The corresponding subtitle file in your native language: **(optional)**

Next on the list is the corresponding subtitle file in my native language (English). This is technically optional, but I'm guessing that most people are going to want it. Let's check on [kitsunekko.net](#) to see if they have it. This time I'll go to English Subtitles:



#### Download files:

[English subtitles](#)   
[Japanese subtitles](#)

They do have it! Score:

Shikabane Hime kuro	2 years
Shiki	2 years
<b>Shingeki no Kyojin</b>	6 months
Shin Getter Robo tai Neo Getter Robo	1 year
Shinigami no Ballad	2 years

This time they're zipped files, though, so I don't need to use Flashgot:

kitsunekko.net > English subtitles > Shingeki no Kyojin

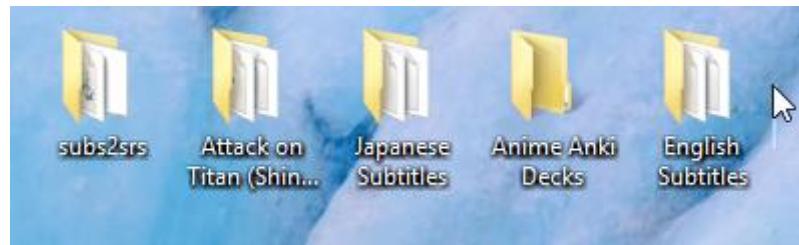
Sort by: File↑ Size Date

Shingeki no Kyojin.7z	4 MB	1 year
Shingeki no Kyojin English subs (01 - 25) Bluray.rar	260 KB	6 months
<b>[EveTaku] Shingeki no Kyojin 01 - 25 (1280x720).zip</b>	870 KB	1 year

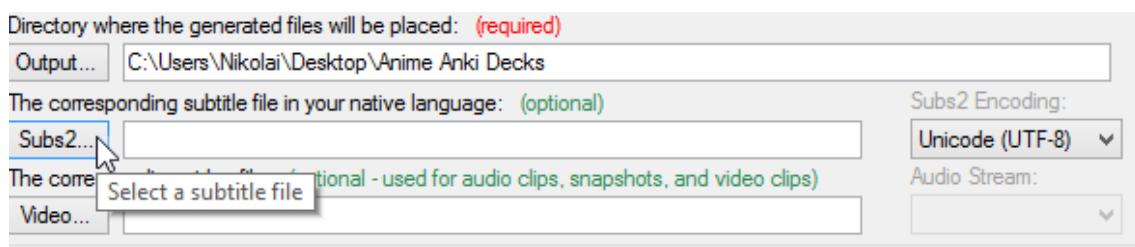
**Upload a file**

I have no idea which one I should choose, so I just guess and choose the third one. I download the .zip file, then extract all of the contents to a new folder called "English

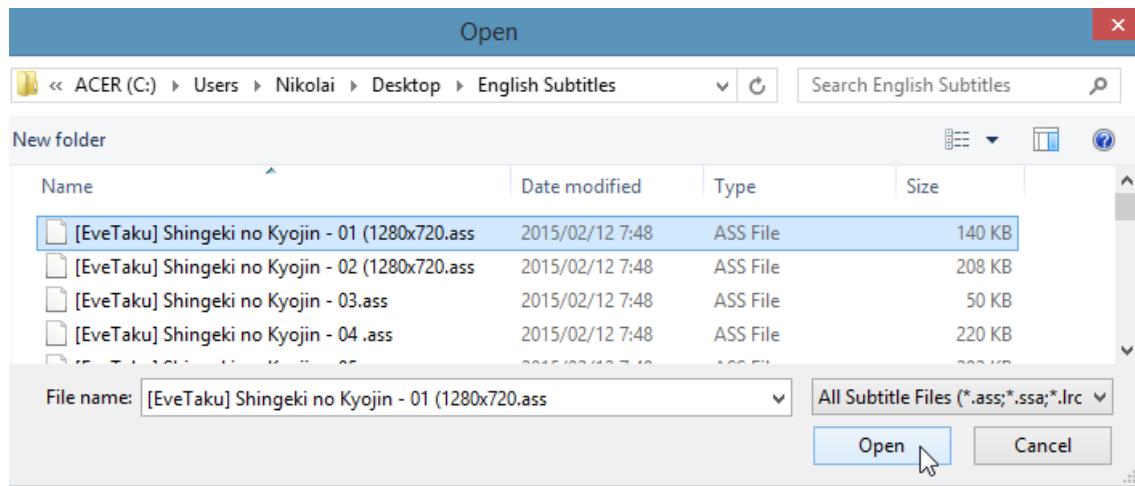
Subtitles:"



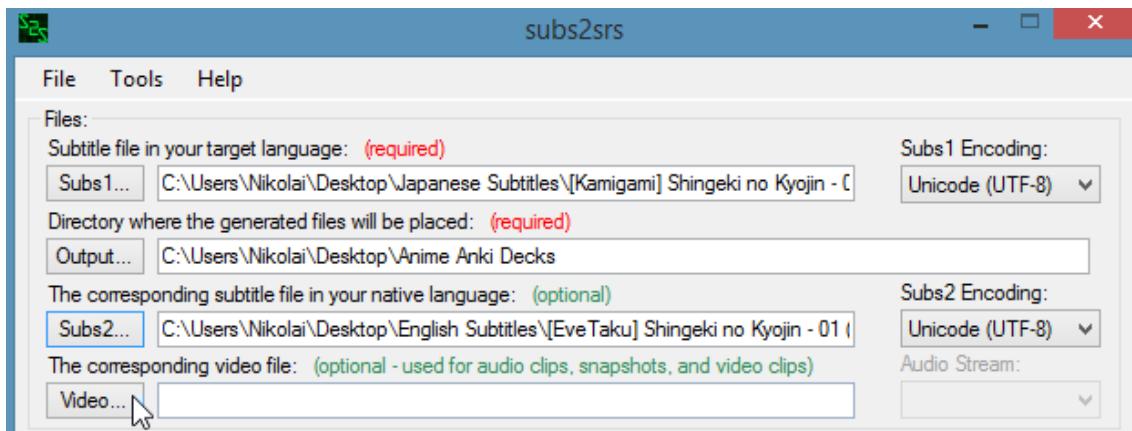
I go back to subs2srs so that I can direct it to my English subtitle file:



Since we're starting with Episode 1, I select the subtitle file for Episode 1:

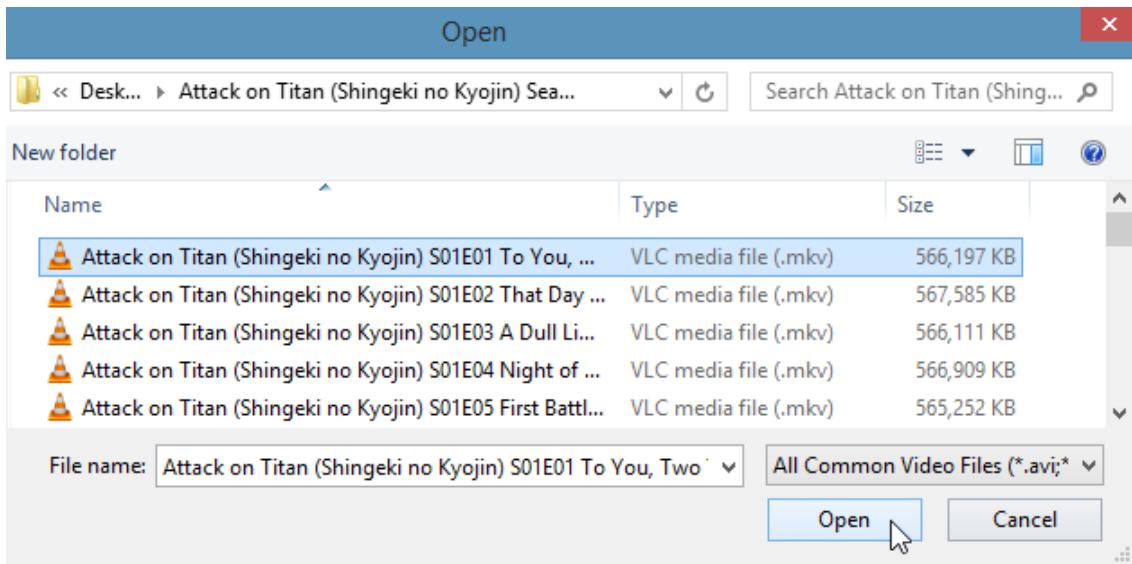


The only thing left to do now is to indicate to subs2srs where the corresponding video file is:



I can't really give you much advice on how or where to get your Japanese video files. Ideally, I suppose you would be buying original DVDs of the anime series you are planning to watch and ripping them onto your computer. Other impatient, unsavory characters might be using a VPN that protects their privacy like [BitGuard](#), [PIA](#), or [CyberGhost](#) along with a torrent downloader like [uTorrent](#) and a torrent search engine like [Kickass Torrents](#), [The Pirate Bay](#), or [Torrentz](#).

Anyways, once you get some anime video files that do not have hard subtitles, you can point subs2srs to them. For this example, I'll be using Episode 01 of Shingeki no Kyojin:



So now I have all of my file options set:

Files:

Subtitle file in your target language: **(required)**  
 C:\Users\Nikolai\Desktop\Japanese Subtitles\[Kamigami] Shingeki no Kyojin - [

Directory where the generated files will be placed: **(required)**  
 C:\Users\Nikolai\Desktop\Anime Anki Decks

The corresponding subtitle file in your native language: **(optional)**  
 C:\Users\Nikolai\Desktop\English Subtitles\[EveTaku] Shingeki no Kyojin - 01 [

The corresponding video file: **(optional - used for audio clips, snapshots, and video clips)**  
 C:\Users\Nikolai\Desktop\Attack on Titan (Shingeki no Kyojin) Season 1\Attack

Subs1 Encoding:

Subs2 Encoding:

Audio Stream:

Next, I want to check my Subtitle Options:

Subtitle Options:

Use Timings From:  Span (h:mm:ss):  Time Shift:  
 Subs1 Start: 0:01:30 Subs1: 0 ms  
 Subs2 End: 0:22:30 Subs2: 0 ms

[Advanced subtitle options...](#)

I'm not actually changing these at all, but you might need to if the times in your subtitles don't match the times in your video.

Next we'll need to set our Audio options. I'm not changing these at all, either:

Generate Audio Clips:

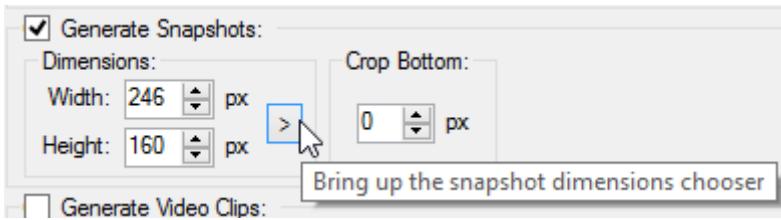
Source:  Extract from video using a bitrate of 128 kb/s  Pad Timings:  
 Audio... Start: 250 ms  Normalize Audio  
 End: 250 ms

Next we have the options for snapshots:

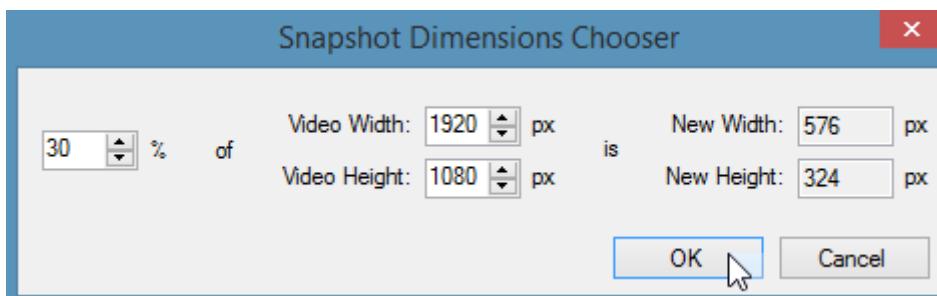
Generate Snapshots:

Dimensions: Width: 240 px Height: 160 px  Crop Bottom: 0 px

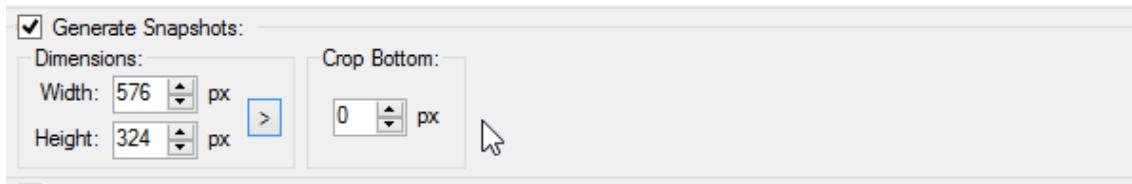
The default is 240px by 160px, but personally I'd like my pics to be a little bit bigger, so I'm going to change this. First I click that little arrow to bring up the snapshots dimension chooser:



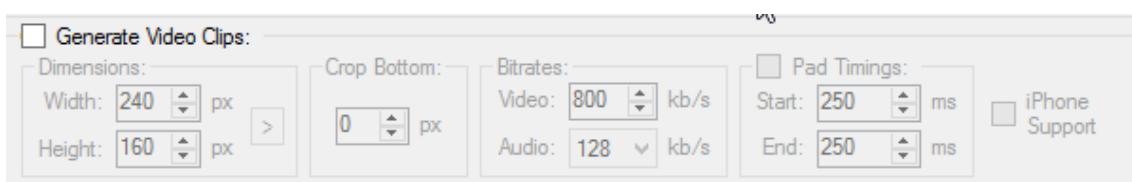
This will allow me to make sure that I keep the correct proportions for width and height of snapshots:



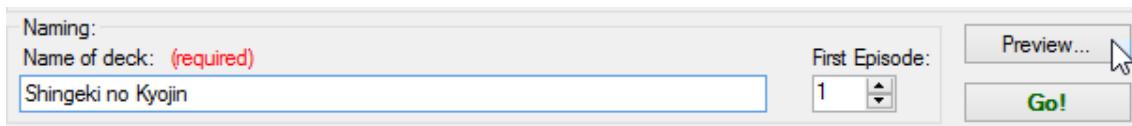
I went with 30%, which for this clip is 576px by 324px:



There's also an option to generate video clips, but I'm just going to skip this. Personally, don't like including video clips, because the huge amount of data is prone to bogging down my Anki program when syncing:

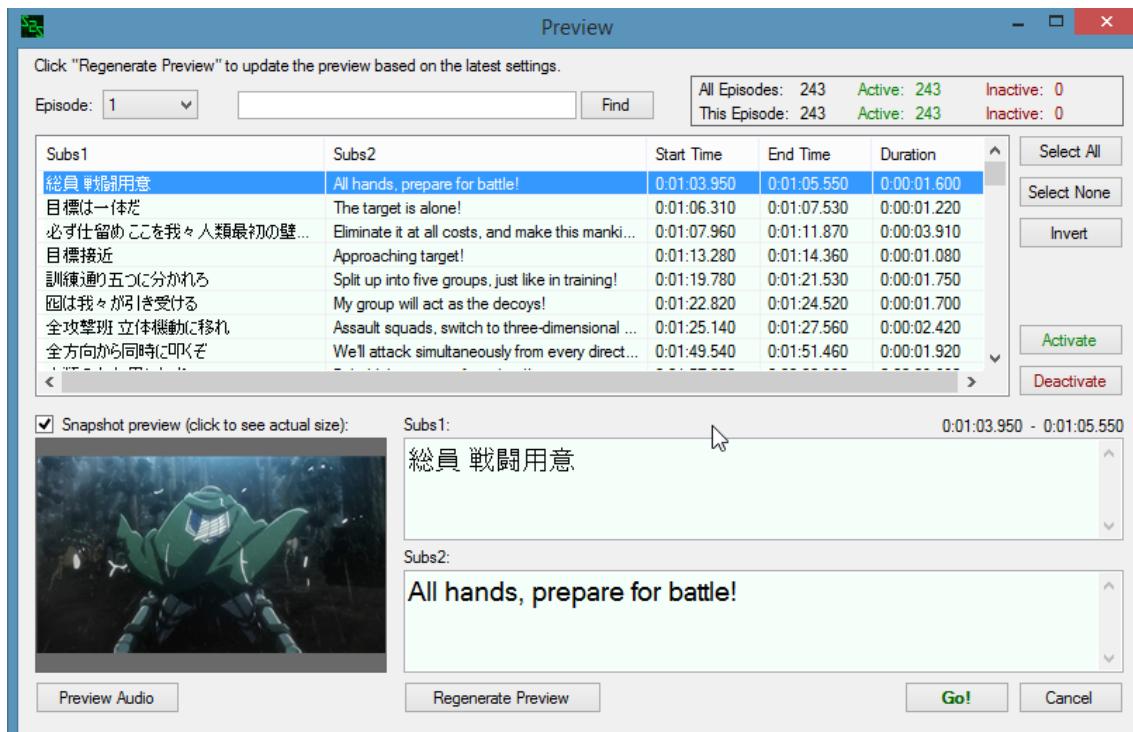


The last thing that I need to do is to name my deck. I'm calling it Shingeki no Kyojin:



Then I click the "Preview..." link. This will give me a preview of all of the cards to be

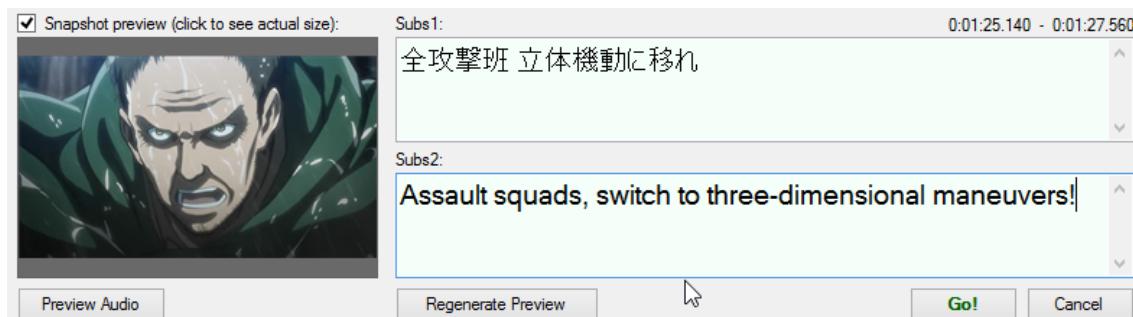
generated:



In total, it looks like Episode 01 is going to have 243 flashcards!

The first thing you should do now is scroll through some different cards, clicking the “Preview Audio” button in the bottom left corner. If the audio doesn’t match one or both of your subtitles, then you will probably need to adjust the setting of your subtitles. For more info on how to do this, you can check out the [subs2srs documentation page](#).

Once I confirm that my audio and subtitles are matching up, I can remove any clips that I don’t want to appear in my deck. For example, the first scene of the show has some military jargon that you may or may not be interested in, spoken at breakneck speeds:



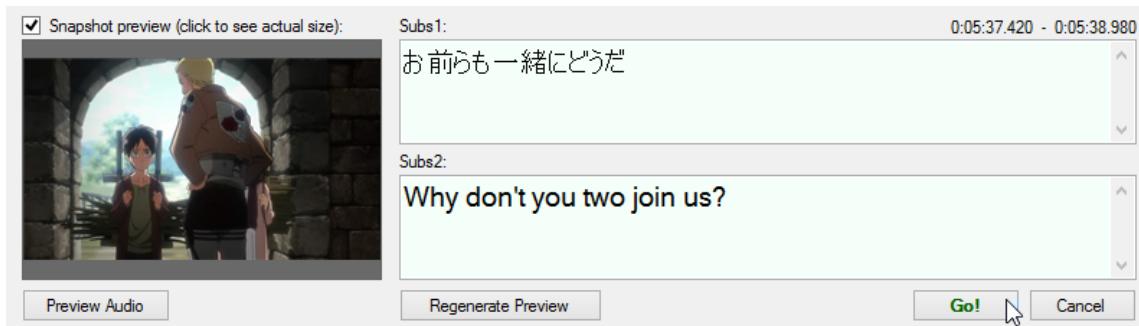
Conversely, you may wish to remove clips that you think are too easy or pointless. For example, this one is just someone's name:



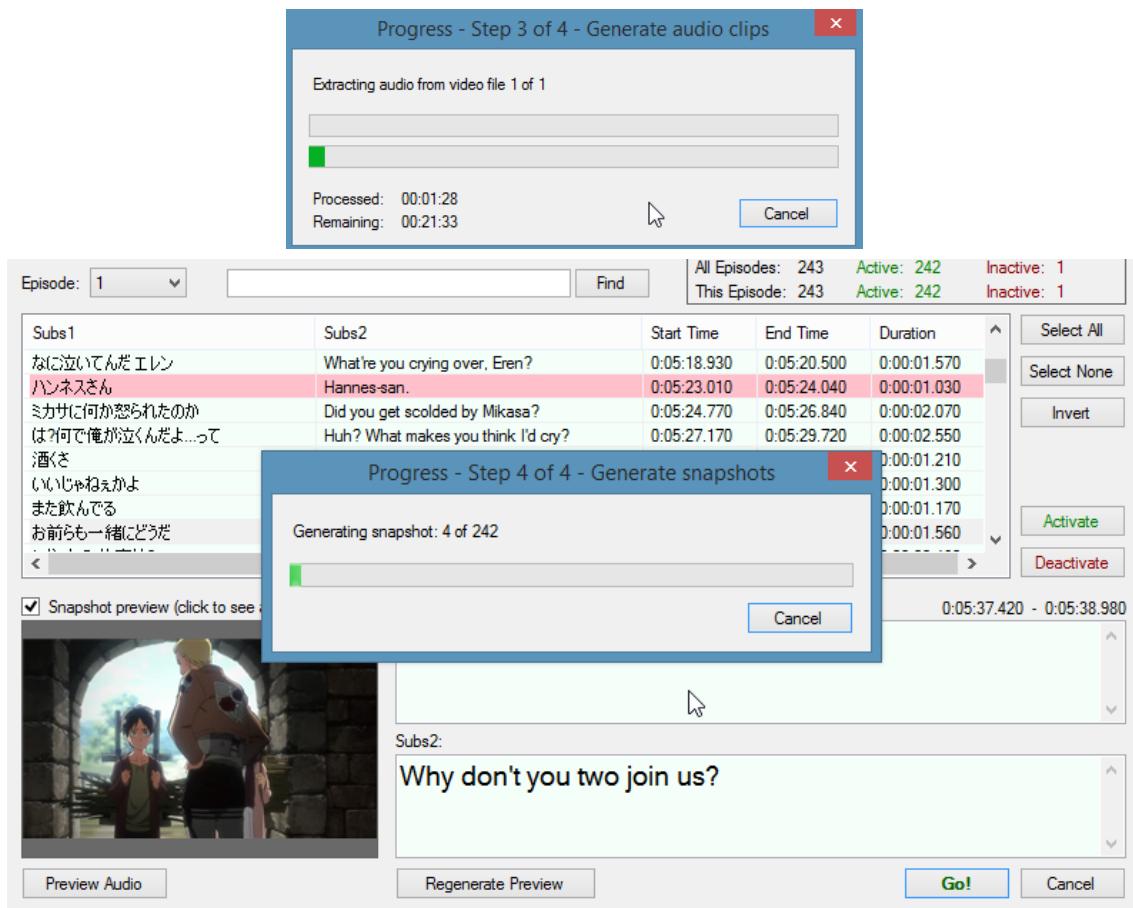
To remove it, I select it, then click "Deactivate":



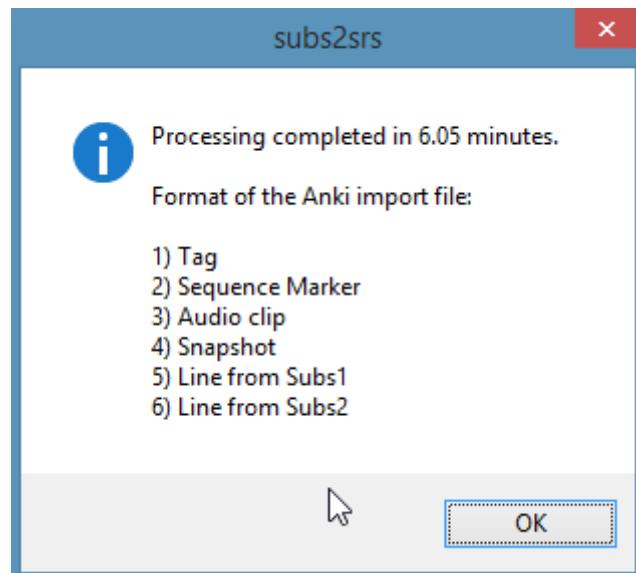
It's probably best to go through all of them if you have time, only activating cards that you think will be useful for your studies. Or you can be totally lazy and just click "Go!" at the bottom of the screen like I usually do. I figure I can just delete cards I don't want while studying, anyways:



After clicking "Go!" I can watch and wait while [subs2srs](#) works its magic:



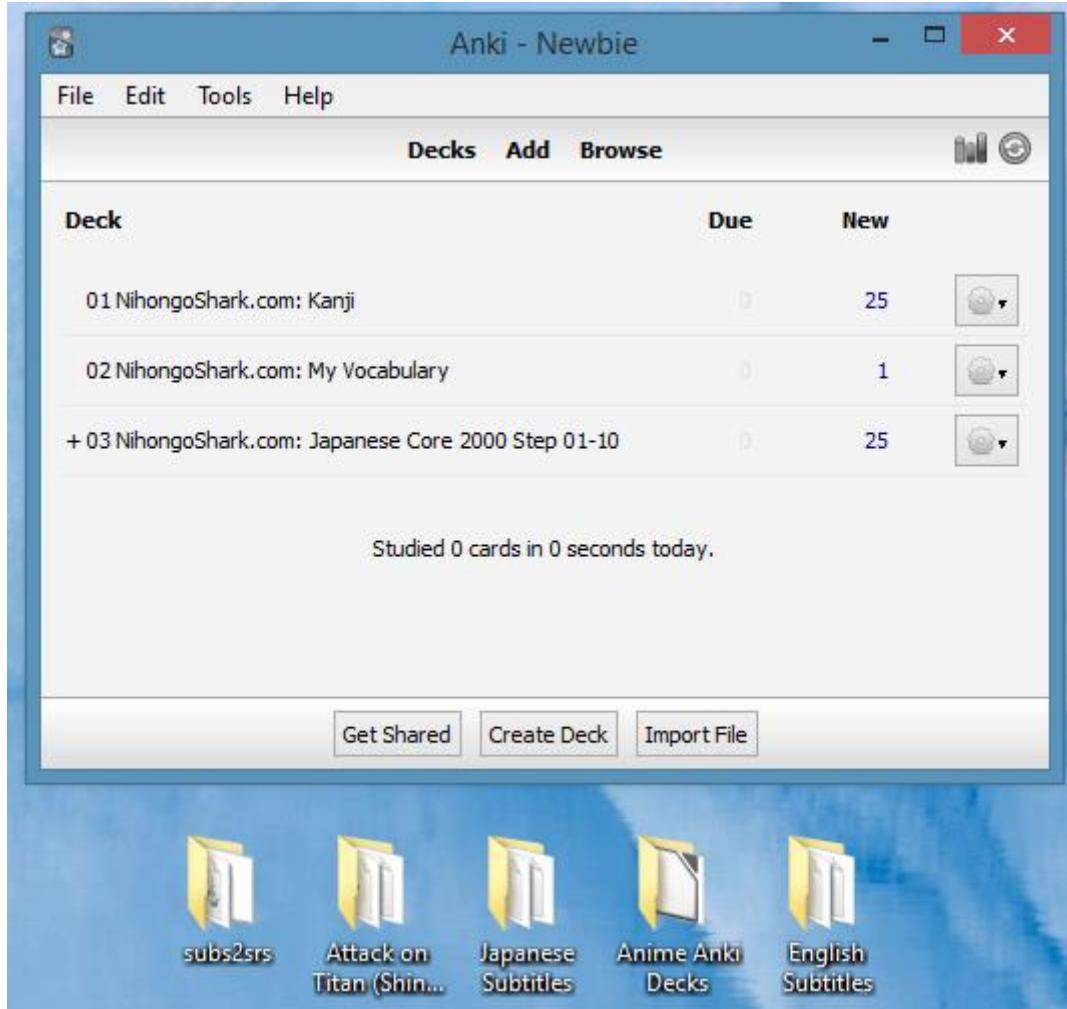
When the program finishes, this is the message you will see:



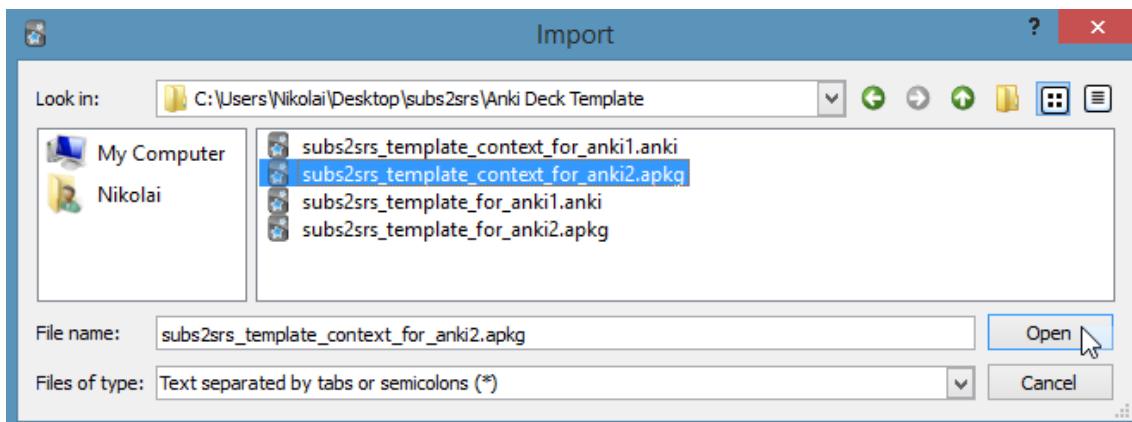
It's important to make a note of the format of the Anki import file, which we will now be

importing!

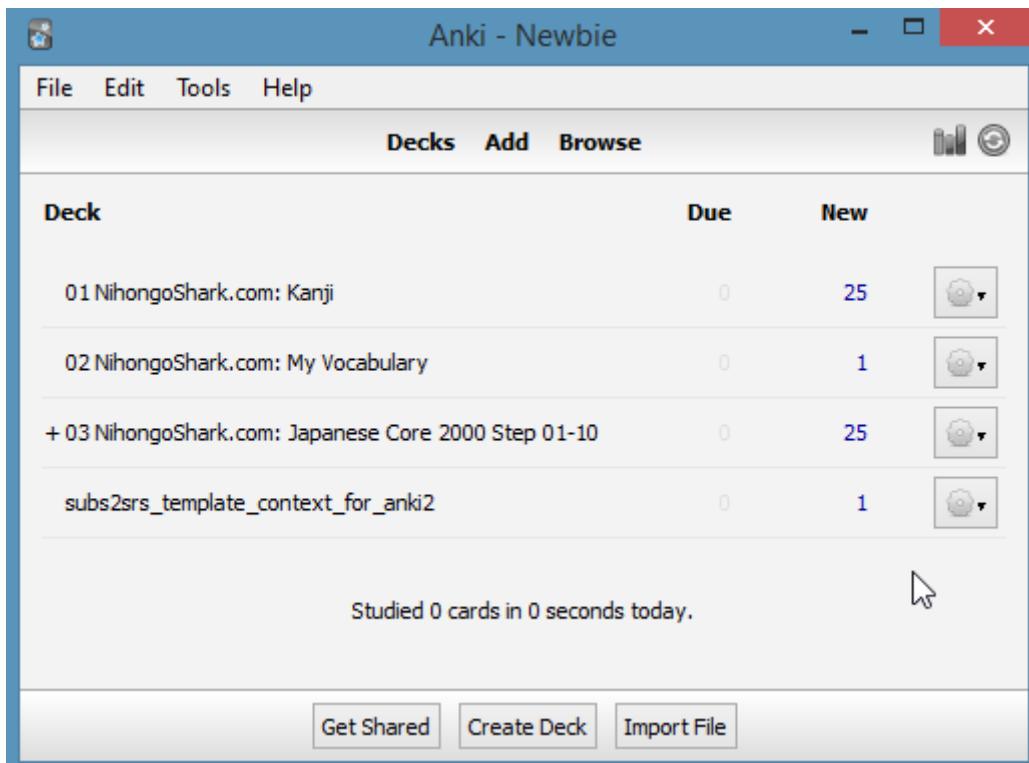
If I open up Anki, I can see my 3 decks that I created in Phases #2-3:



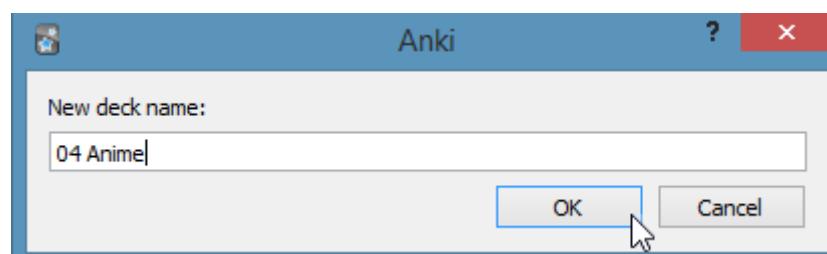
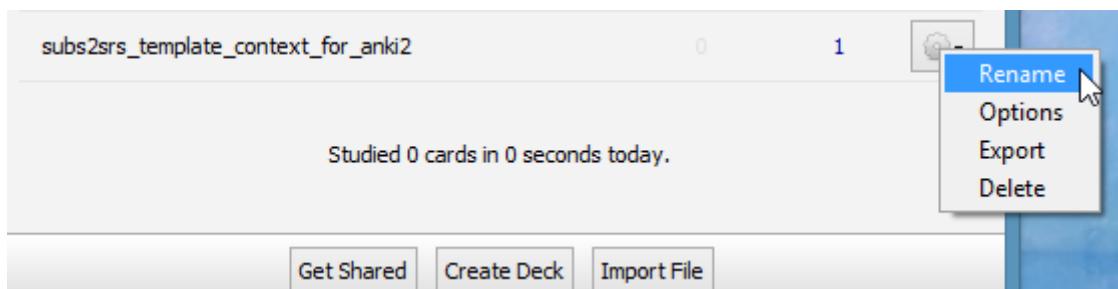
Now I'm going to get really crazy and create a *fourth* deck for anime cards. Don't click "Create Deck," though. Instead, we want to click "Import File." In the original folder that we created when we extracted the [subs2srs](#) program, there is a folder called Anki Deck Templates. This is where we're going to find our new deck template:



Since I'm using Anki2 (the current version of Anki), I'm going to open the template context for Anki2 shown above. This will add a fourth deck to my Anki program:

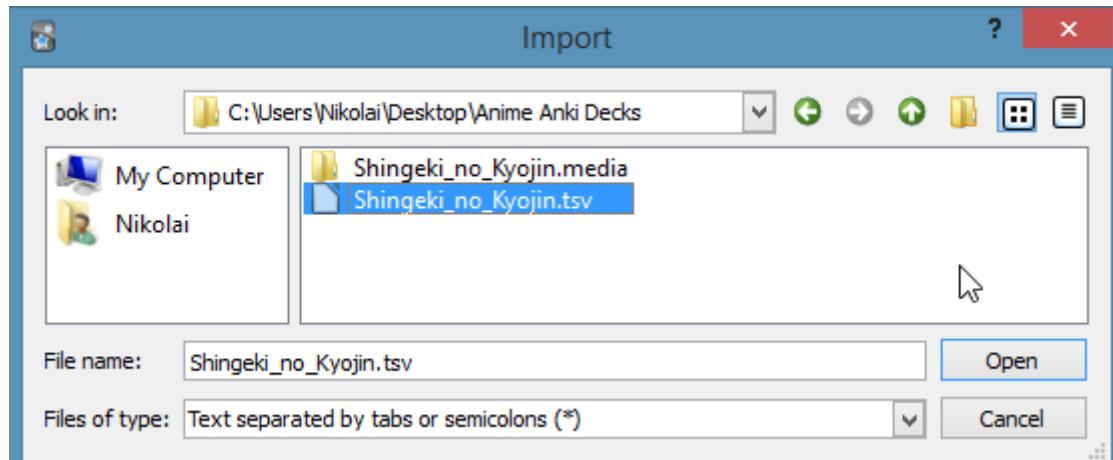


I'm going to change the name to "04 Anime." I write "04," because Anki always shows decks in alphabetical order, and I want this one to have the lowest priority:

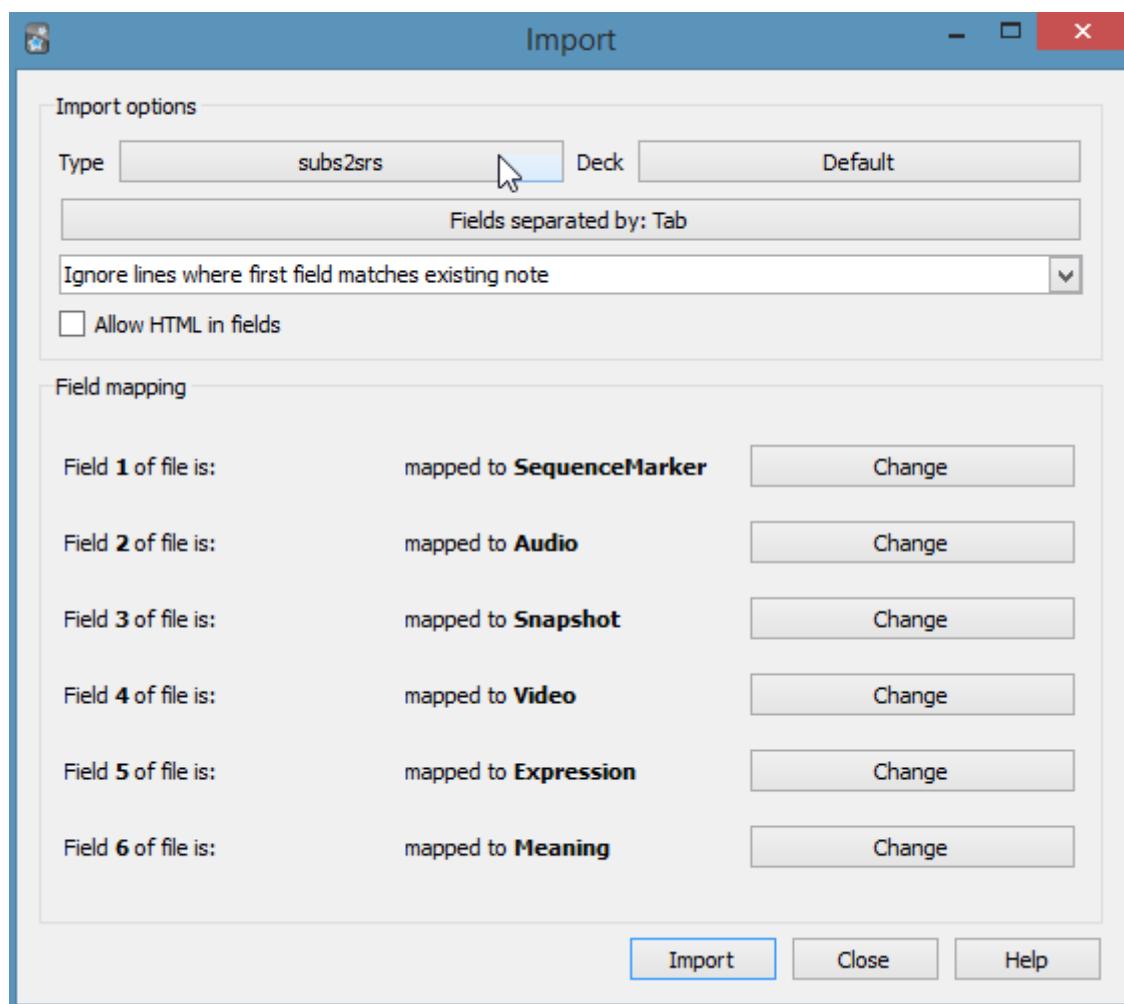


And now I have four decks in my Anki program.

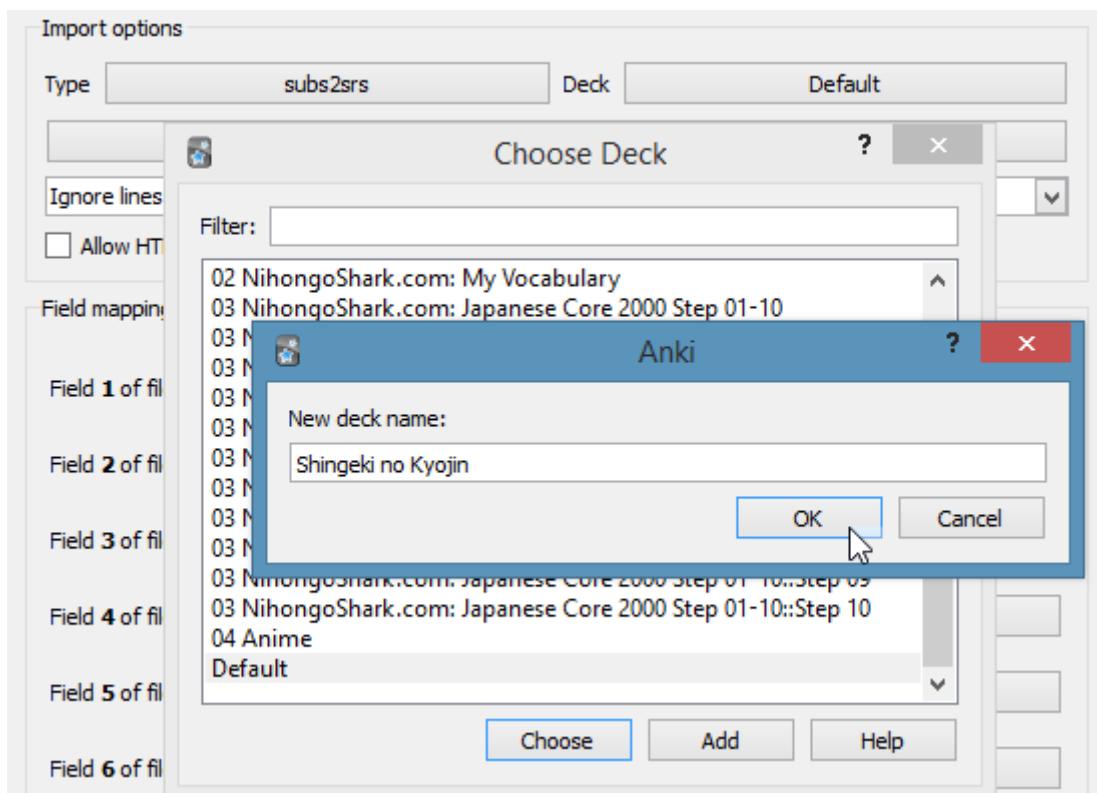
Okay, now I'm finally ready to import my anime cards! On Anki's main page, I click "Import File" again, and this time I go find the Shingeki no Kyojin deck that I created in the Anime Anki Decks folder using subs2srs:



This will bring up the Import dialog. First, make sure that the template is set to "subs2srs:"

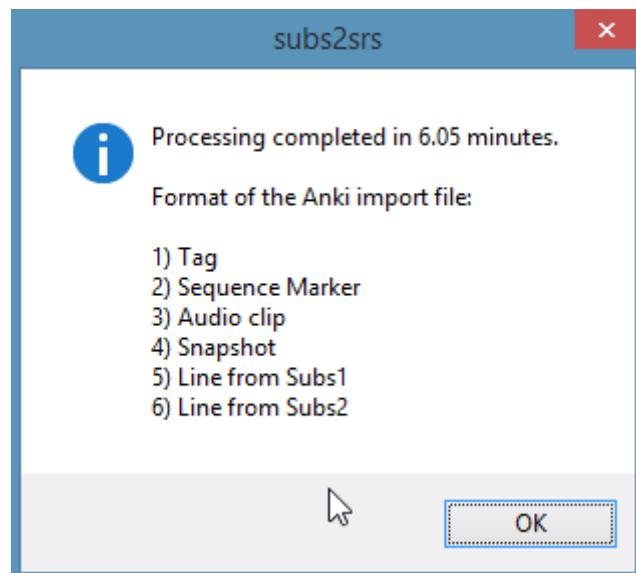


Next, we need to choose a deck. I'm actually going to create a new deck for *Shingeki no Kyojin*, so I click the box next to “Deck” (on the screenshot above, it says “Default”):

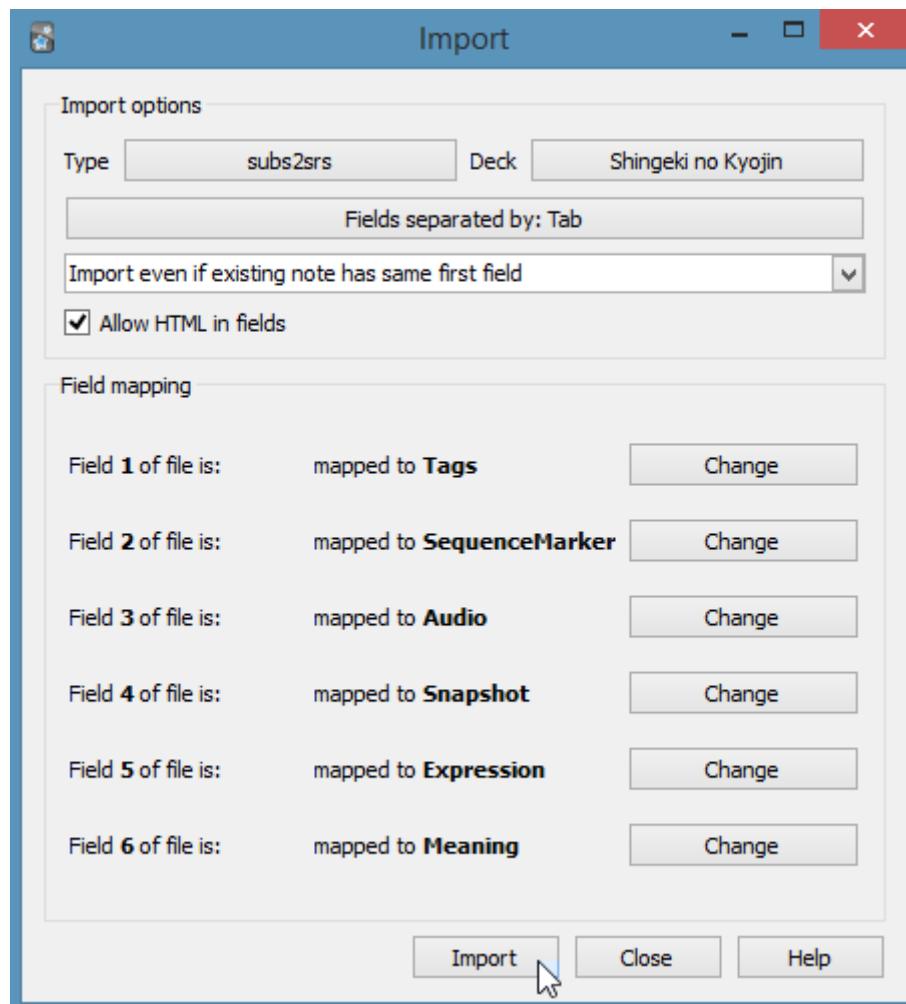


Clicking “Default” brings up the “Choose Deck” dialog, and then clicking “Add” brings up the option to write my new deck name. After entering it, I click “OK.”

Before I Import the file, I need to make sure that the Field Mapping matches the format of the Anki import file that I created. If you recall, it's:

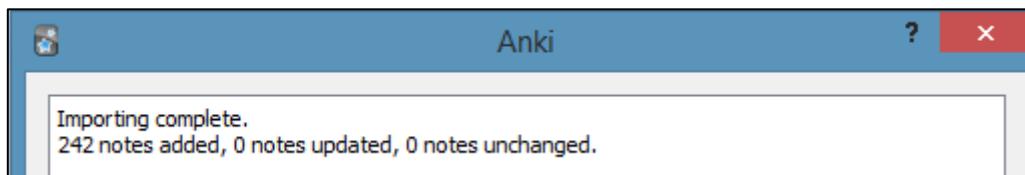


Once I edit the “Field Mapping” options a bit, I get everything to match (note also that the box is checked for “Allow HTML in fields”):



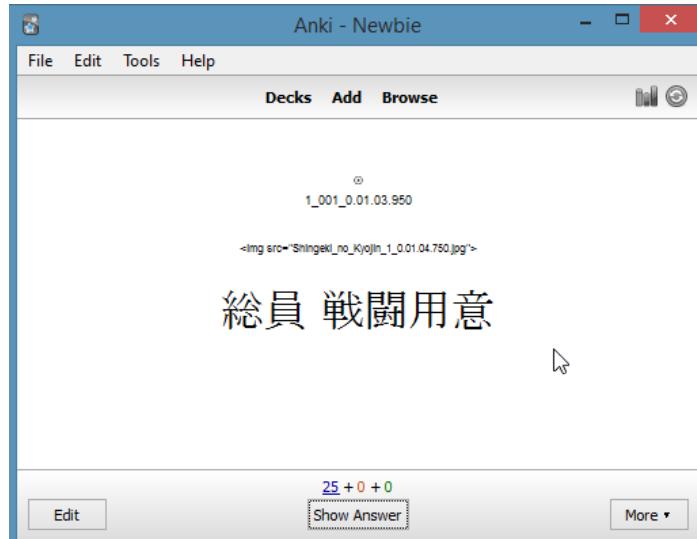
(#5 and #6 in my generated file were called “Subs1” and “Subs2,” but in my field mapping options, they are called “Expression” and “Meaning.” This is because “Subs1 = Japanese subtitle = Expression” and “Subs2 = English subtitle = Meaning.”)

It looks like everything is good to go, so let’s click “Import!” When I do so, Anki very quickly imports all of my cards:



We’re not quite done yet, though. If I go and look at one of my cards, it still has no audio

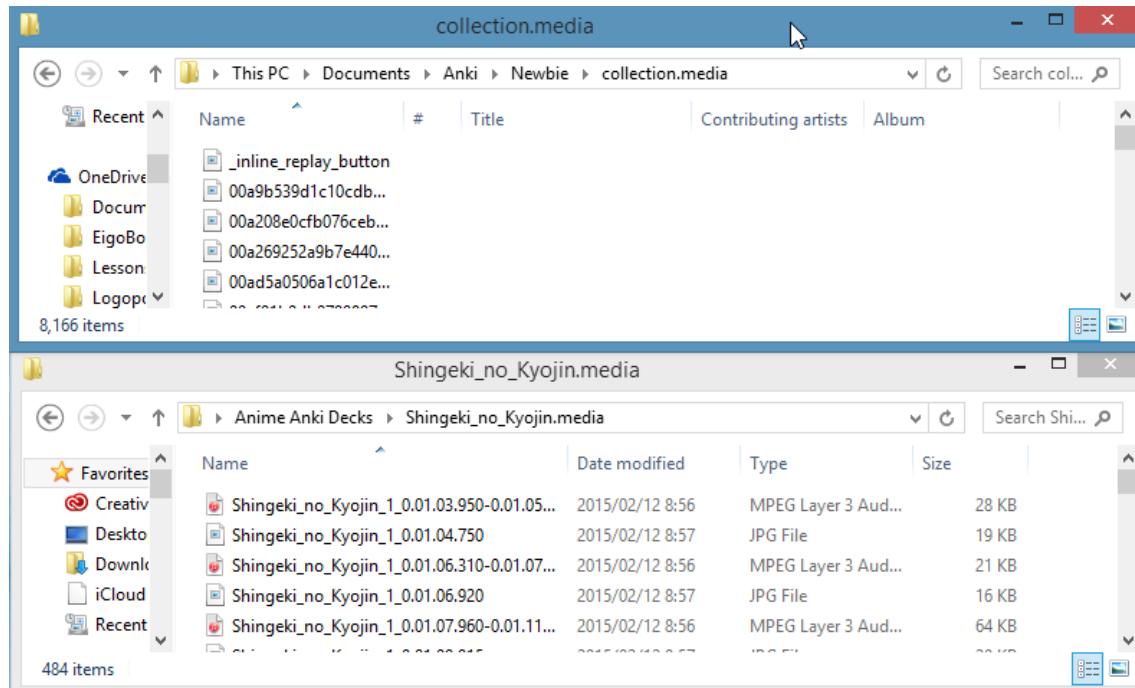
and no snapshot:



This is because we still need to add the media for this deck to our Anki media collection.

My Anki media collection (by default) is located under Documents → Anki → User Profile (=Newbie) → collection.media. And my media collection for this Anki deck is located in Anime Anki Decks → Shingeki\_no\_Kyojin.media.

Here are the two folders side by side:

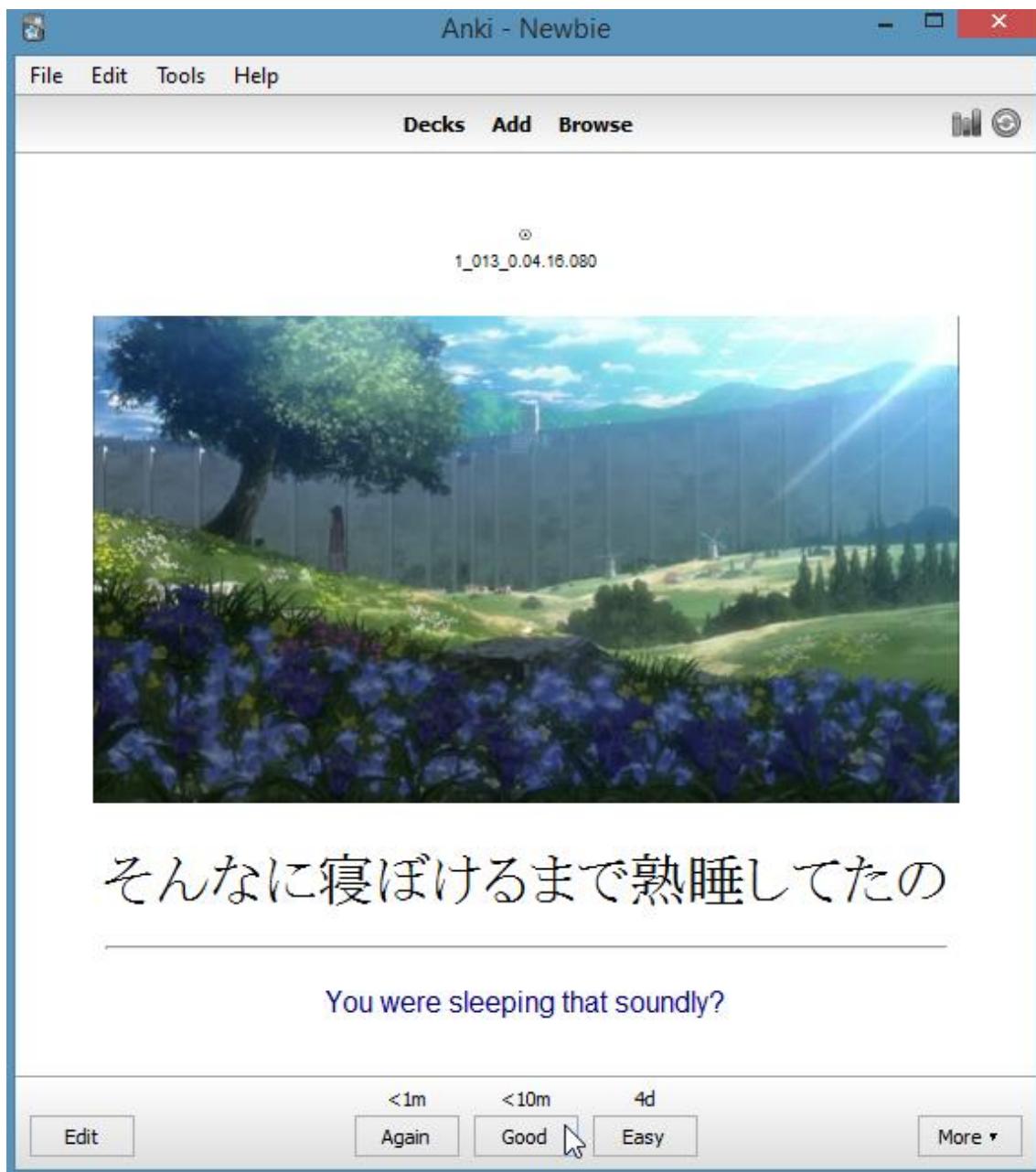


I need to take all of the files in the folder on the bottom and move all of them to the folder on the top, which is my Anki media collection.

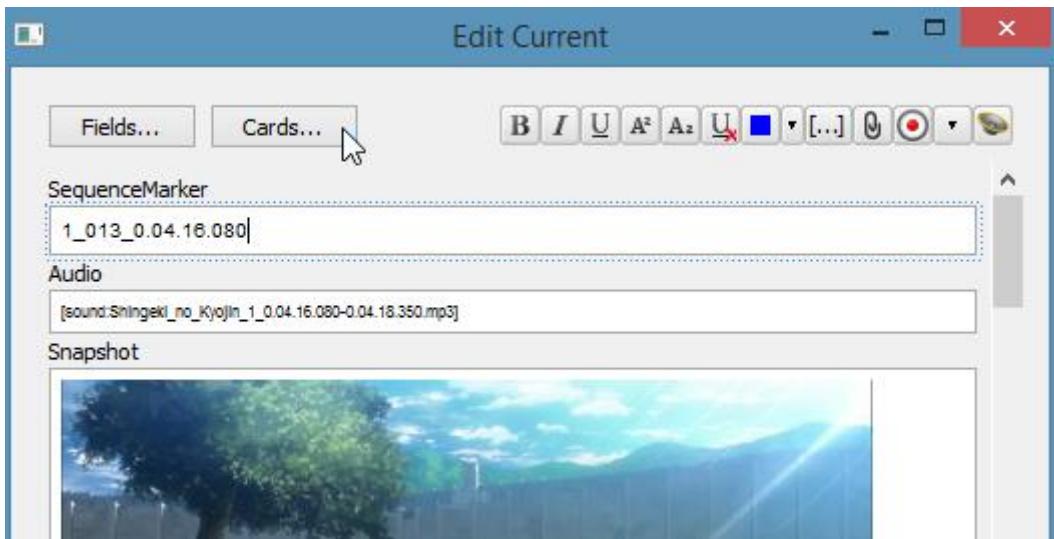
Now the front of my cards look like this:



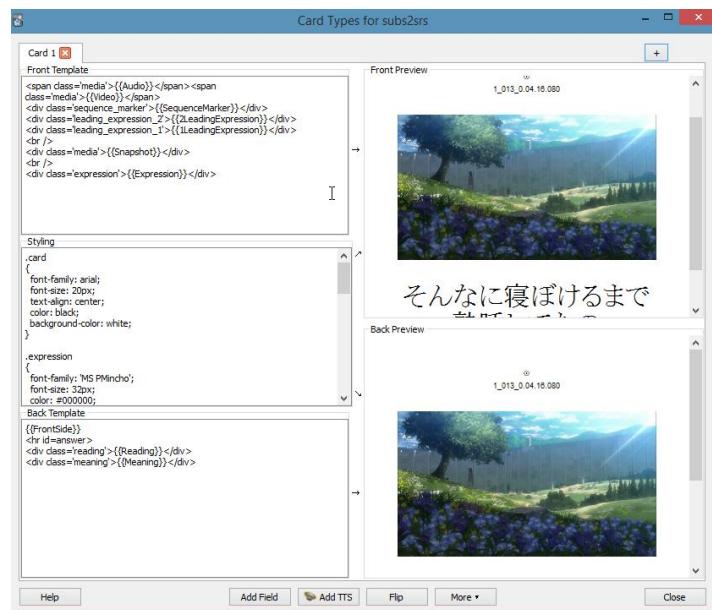
And the back of my cards look like this:



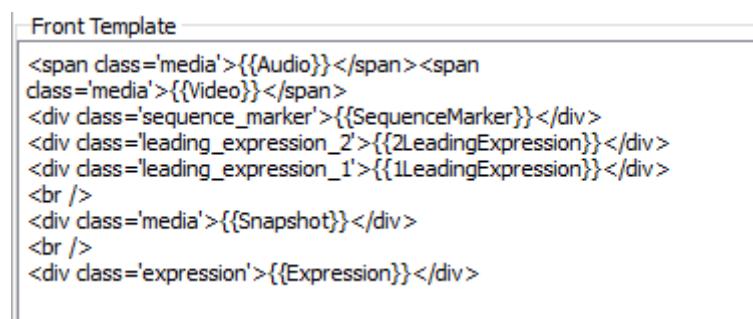
You could leave the cards like that if you want, but I'm going to change mine up a bit. First I click "Edit" in the bottom right corner, then when the Edit box comes up I click "Cards:"



Agh HTML! Look out:



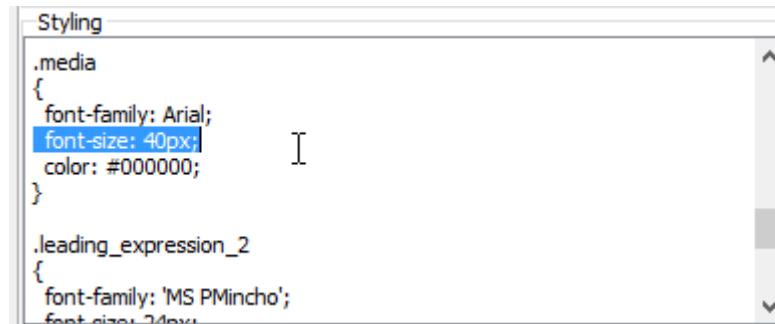
I'm going to change the front template a bit:



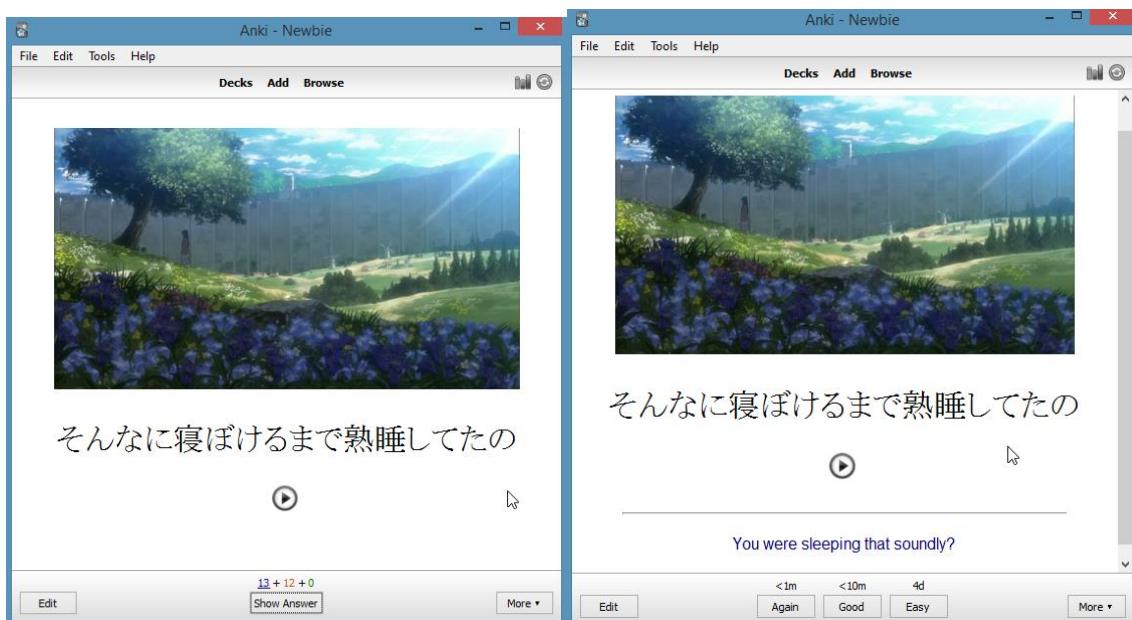
Specifically, I'm going to move the Snapshot and Expression to the top and remove the Sequence Marker:

```
Front Template
<div class='media'>{{Snapshot}}</div>
<br />
<div class='expression'>{{Expression}}</div>
<br />
<span class='media'>{{Audio}}</span>
<span class='media'>{{Video}}</span>
<div class='leading_expression_2'>{{2LeadingExpression}}</div>
<div class='leading_expression_1'>{{1LeadingExpression}}</div>
```

I also don't like the little tiny Play button, so under the Styling section, I'm going to change the font size for "media" from 8px to 40px:



I could end my editing here, and this is what my new and beautiful cards would look like:

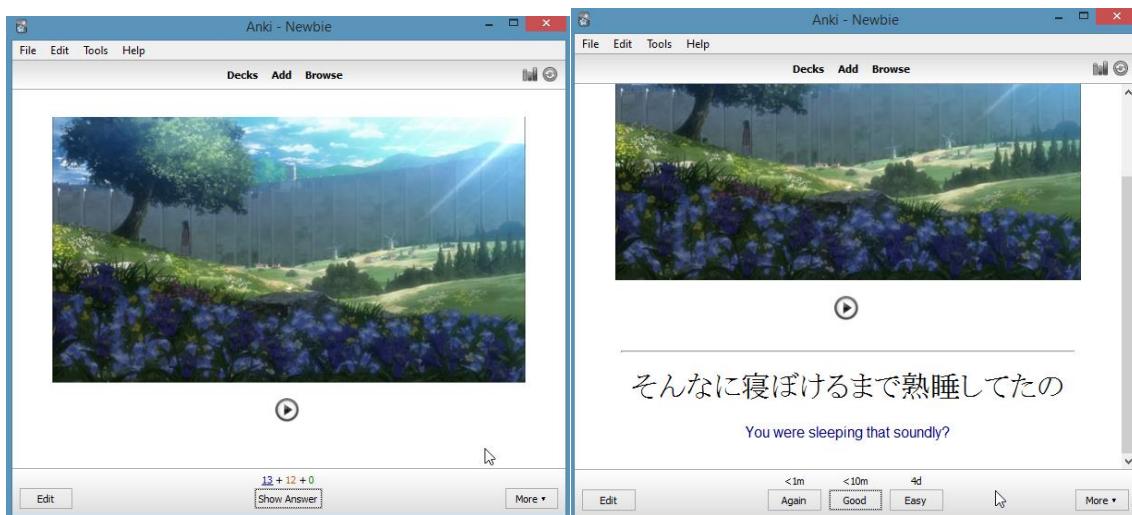


But I think that what I really want is to study these cards to improve my listening. In that case, I can move the “Expression” tag to the Answer side of the card:

```
Front Template
<div class='media'>{{Snapshot}}</div>
<span class='media'>{{Audio}}</span>
<span class='media'>{{Video}}</span>
<div class='leading_expression_2'>{{2LeadingExpression}}</div>
<div class='leading_expression_1'>{{1LeadingExpression}}</div>

Back Template
{{FrontSide}}
<hr id=answer>
<div class='expression'>{{Expression}}</div>
<div class='reading'>{{Reading}}</div><br/>
<div class='meaning'>{{Meaning}}</div>
```

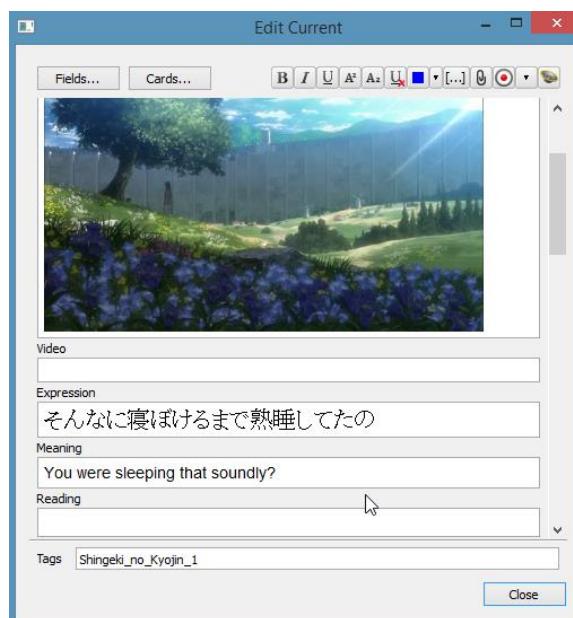
These give me cards that look like this:



This way, I'll be practicing catching the spoken Japanese, using the snapshot as a memory device, and then checking my understanding on the answer side. Now that I'm at a higher level, I also like to remove the English from the cards. I don't really need it anymore anyways, making the back side of my cards look like this:



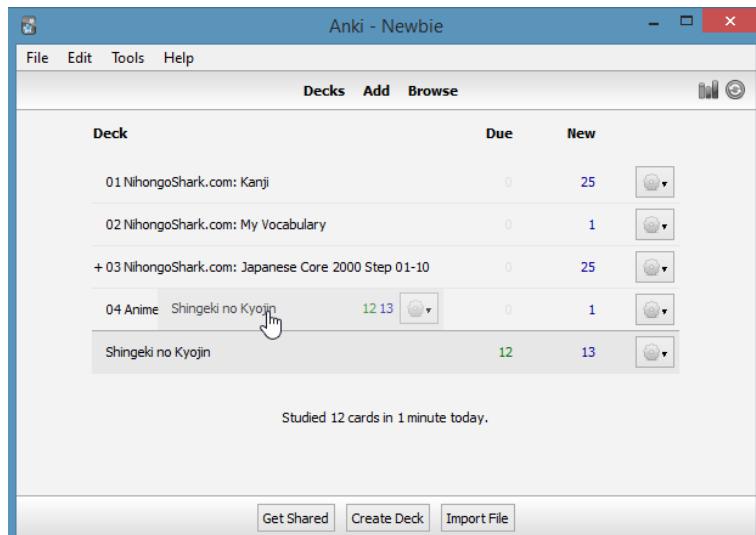
If I don't understand something, then I can just click edit and read the English translation in the card field:



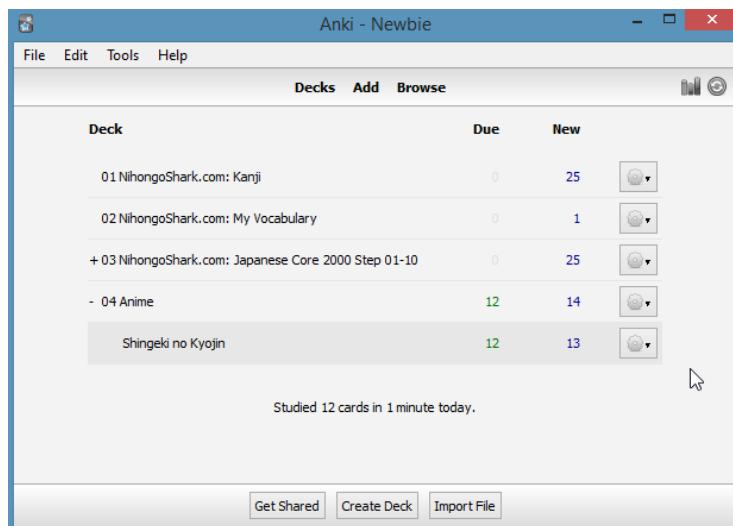
But that rarely happens, anyways.

So there you have it! Anime into intelligent flashcards! I don't know about you, but I think that that's amazing.

Lastly, if you're OCD like me, you can drag your new [Shingeki no Kyojin] deck into your Anime deck, keeping everything nice and organized:



Just by dragging one deck on top of another, you can make it into a sub-deck. That way , when you add new decks for different shows, you can keep the shows (and even seasons) separate, but all categorized under the Anime flashcards deck:



If you have some trouble getting your deck set up, please check out the instructions on the [subs2srs page](#), or [this forum thread](#). There have been times when I've had technical problems getting a deck set up, but usually I'm able to get things worked out after trying a

がんば  
few times. 頑張って !

## Watching with Japanese Subtitles

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Generating Anki cards from anime is certainly a really fun and effective study method, but at my current level of Japanese, I've found that it's much more rewarding to simply watch Japanese TV shows with full Japanese subtitles. Usually my reading speed is no problem to keep up with Japanese subtitles, and in some strange way it seems to be improving my listening. In other words, I rarely make flashcards from anime.

I prefer to watch once with Japanese subtitles, then once without subtitles. In both cases, **I go back and pause the video *every single time* that I don't understand something.** I might even make a note about the time of the video or a certain word so that I can go back and generate a flashcard for it later.

The key here is that this is not 100% passive learning. I am not letting any Japanese go over my head. If I learn every single word of every single episode, then I can go back and re-watch this video anytime for fun, and doing so will (1) be relaxing and entertaining and (2) reinforce my Japanese skills.

If you're still at a lower level of Japanese, you'll probably want to incorporate English subtitles into your studies as well, but I think that you should try to avoid them as much as your level allows. The goal is to be able to watch this without any subtitles at all, right? If so, first we're going to need to understand these videos without English subtitles, then without Japanese subtitles. It's going to take a bit of work, but it's totally doable. After all, I seem to have managed it somehow, and look at me:



Surely you can do better.

### *Drill Episodes into Your Brain*

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Even after you're able to go through an entire episode without any subtitles and understand everything (which is in and of itself a huge amount of work), **I recommend watching that same episode without subtitles as many times as you can bear.** This is one reason that I think Japanese movies are a cool source of study material. There's no temptation to move onto that next episode.

I have had a number of periods where I watch one movie over and over again. For example, there were a couple of months last year when I watched *The Hobbit* in Japanese every night as I went to bed. I got home from work, put on the film, then just relaxed. **I probably watched that movie 100 times.** And some of the phrases really do start to sink into the deepest recesses of your brain. You hear a word that appears in the film out of context, and you can actually hear the voice of the actor saying it in the movie, because you've pretty much memorized the entire movie. Next thing you know, I'm trying to talk like Gandalf and improve my wizard Japanese, to the utter dismay of my girlfriend.

Theoretically, the same thing I did with movies should be feasible with anime and TV shows as well. It simply requires a lot of repetition. Just don't let it seem like a task. I mean, you're studying Japanese by watching TV. That's amazing!

### *This Is Not a Shortcut*

---

Let's not confuse something really fun for something really fast. I don't think anyone can argue that this is an incredibly awesome study method. However, it's not exactly the most structured approach to learning a language.

If you're still a beginner, I think that you might have a very difficult time getting through episodes of anime. For someone who's established a solid foundation (i.e. someone who has completed Phases #2-3 of this study guide), though, studying through anime like this should be a truly rewarding experience. It's a lot of fun for me personally, as well. Going through the flashcards I just created for *Shingeki no Kyojin*, I was sometimes shocked at just how quickly they are speaking, particular in the fight scenes of the first episode.

The main reason that I point out that this is not a shortcut is that you're liable to study hundreds (maybe thousands) of flashcards that contain content you *already* understand. In other words, you'd be studying flashcards you don't need to be studying. At the same time, while studying through anime like this is certainly not a shortcut, it is probably a study method that you will enjoy, and I believe that to be immensely more important.

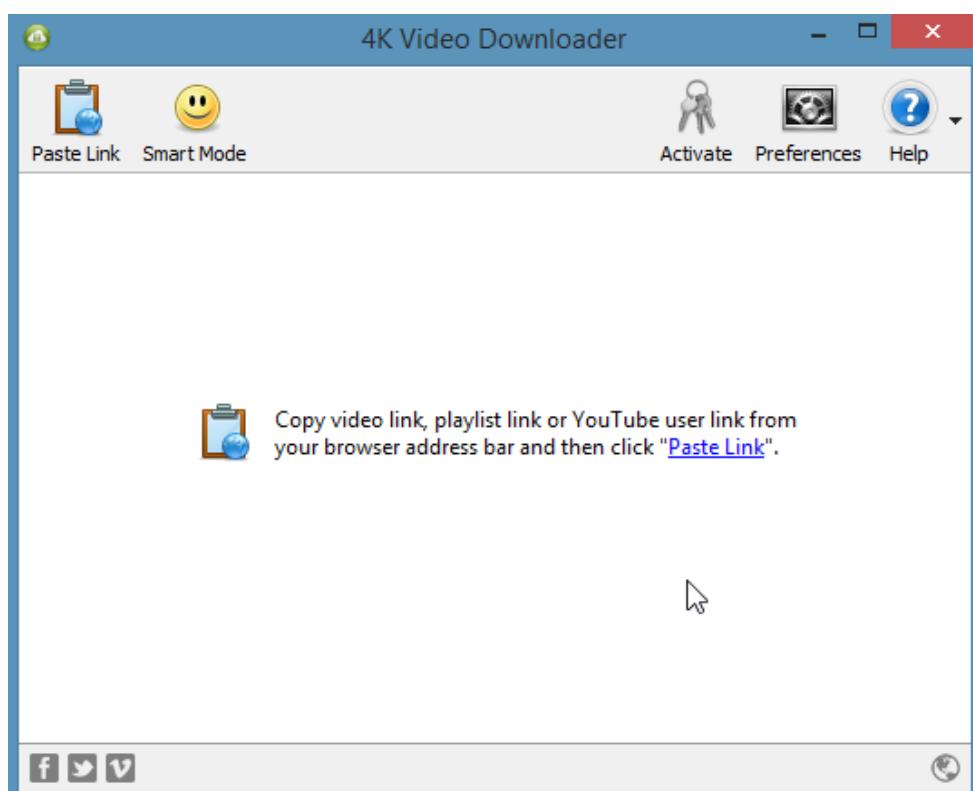
If you love a show, then why not trudge through it one painful step at a time? Take your time to learn every single word, to catch every single phrase. Then every time you watch it in the future, you can relax and let the Japanese float into your ears—all of it processed, understood, and enjoyed by your magnificent brain.

### *Making Anki Decks from YouTube Videos*

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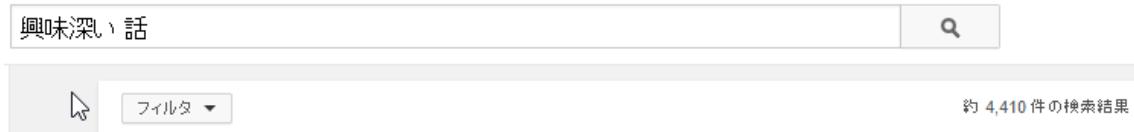
If it seems like a pain to go and download entire series of anime, another option is to simply generate Anki decks with subtitles from YouTube videos. I'm going to do this by using a program called [4K Video Downloader](#). It's free, and you can [get it here](#).

Once you have the program installed, you can open it to see this:

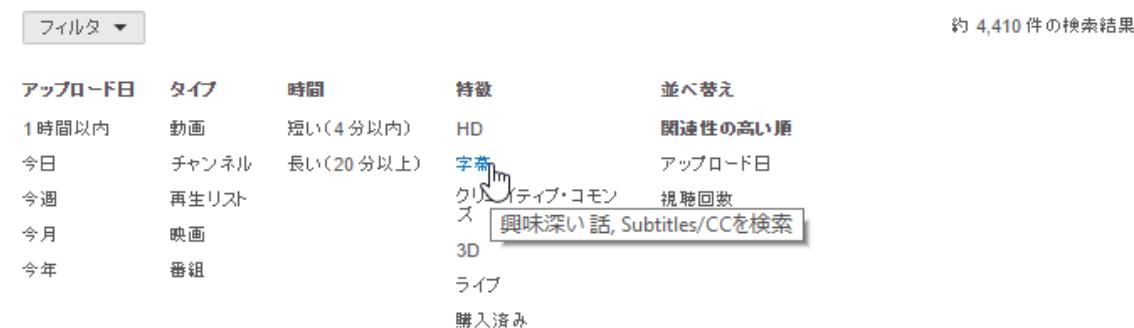


Let's see if we can make a flashcard deck using this guy. First, I'll go to YouTube and

perform a search for 興味深い 話 / *kyouumi-bukai hanashi* / "very interesting talk:"



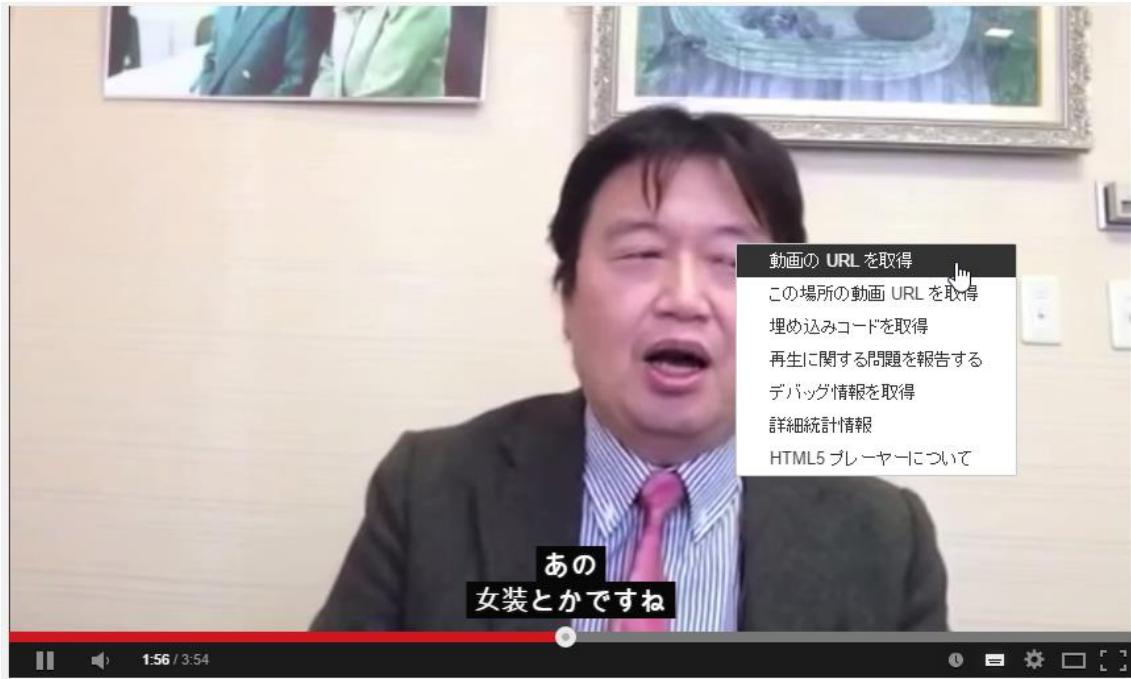
I click on the "Filter" button and change it to only videos with subtitles (字幕):



This narrows down my search results to only 86 videos! Filtering once more for HD videos only, I'm down to 49. I'm not sure if I'll be able to find any good content here. Then I come across this video, which is about "Taboo topics for men:"



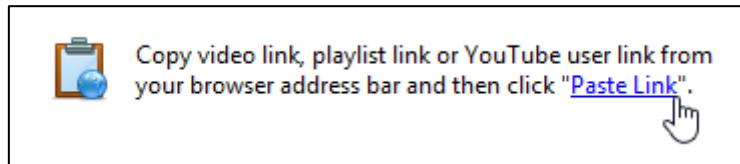
Yeah, whatever, let's go with this one. If you right-click a video, the first link is to get the video's link:



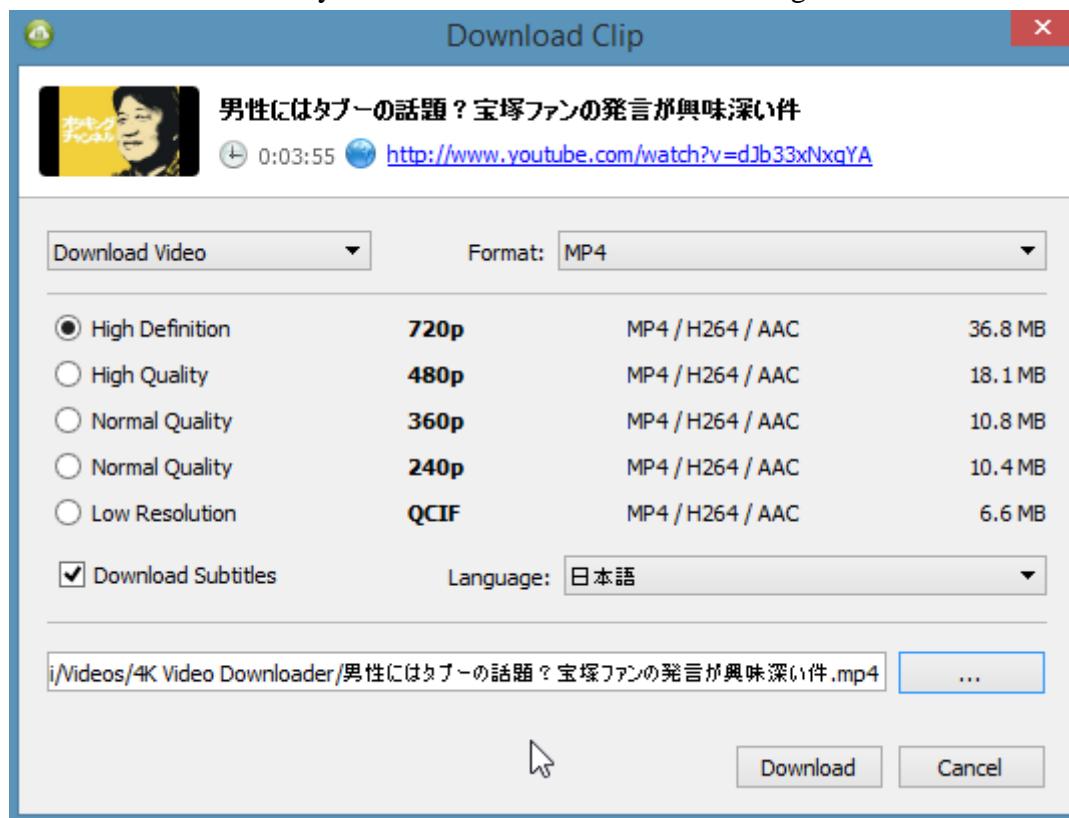
This will pop up, and then I'll hit “Ctrl + C” to copy it to my clipboard:



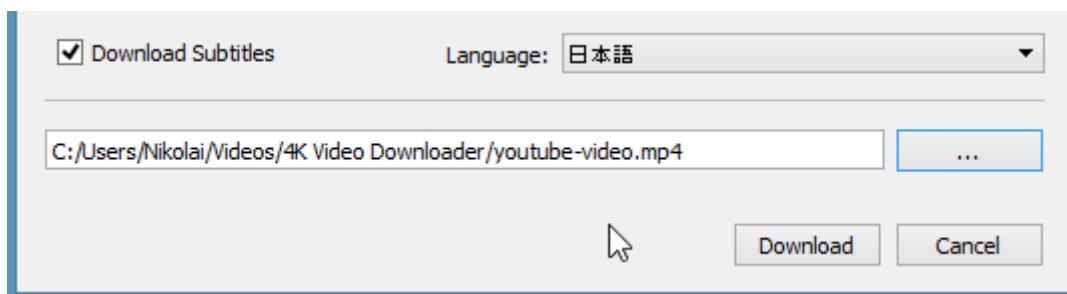
Now I go back to [4K Video Downloader](#) and click “Paste Link:”



4K Video will then analyze the video and show me this dialog:

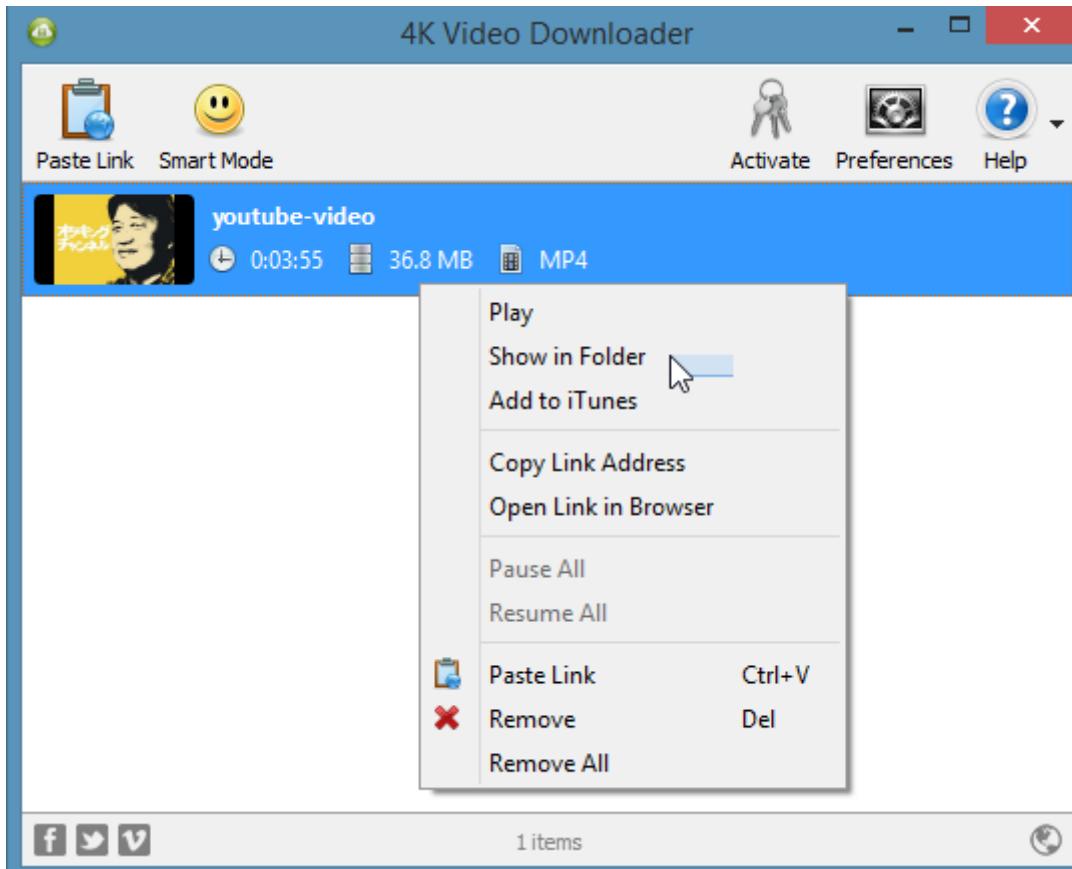


Before I go clicking “Download,” I need to change the output file so that it doesn’t have any Japanese characters, because they seem to confuse subs2srs:

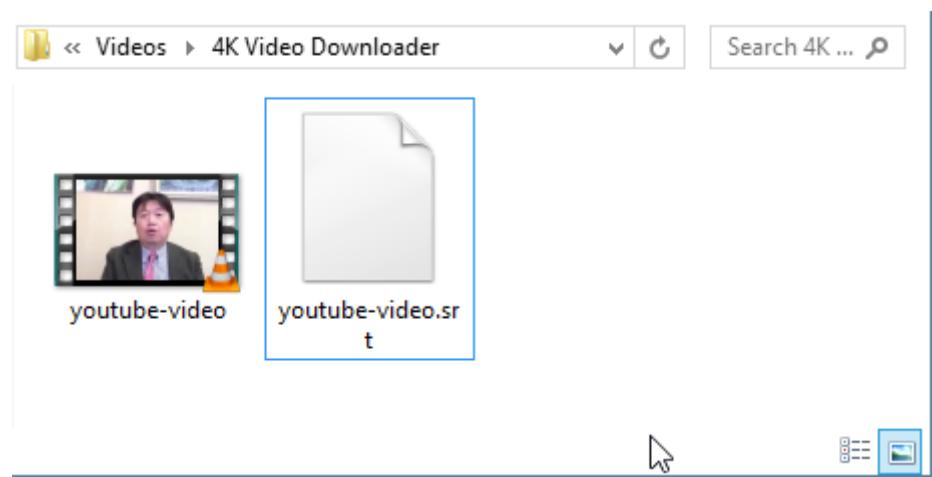


I click “Download,” and it seems that the video and subtitles have been downloaded

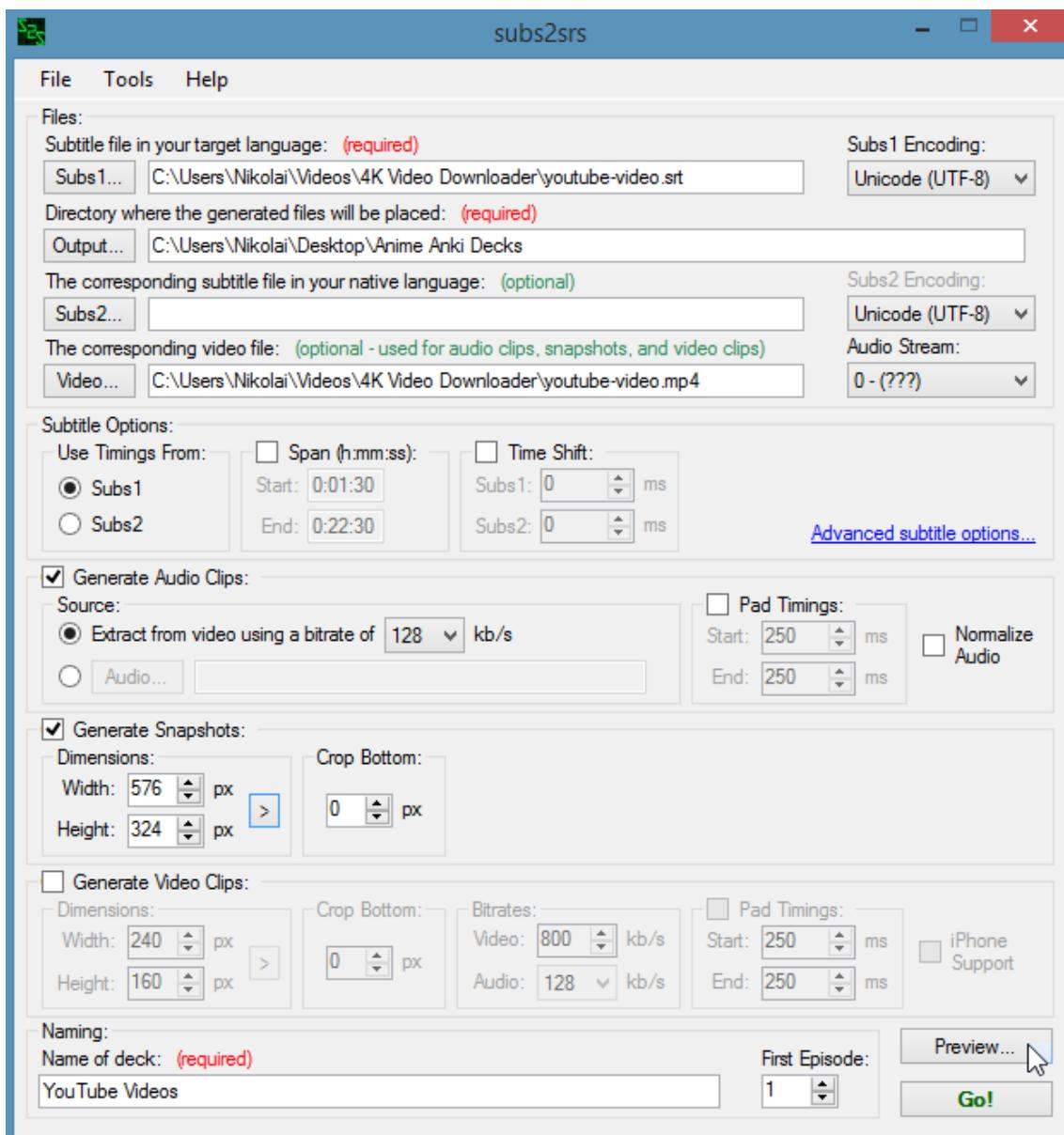
successfully:



I right-click and select “Show in Folder,” and they seem to be there, safe and sound:

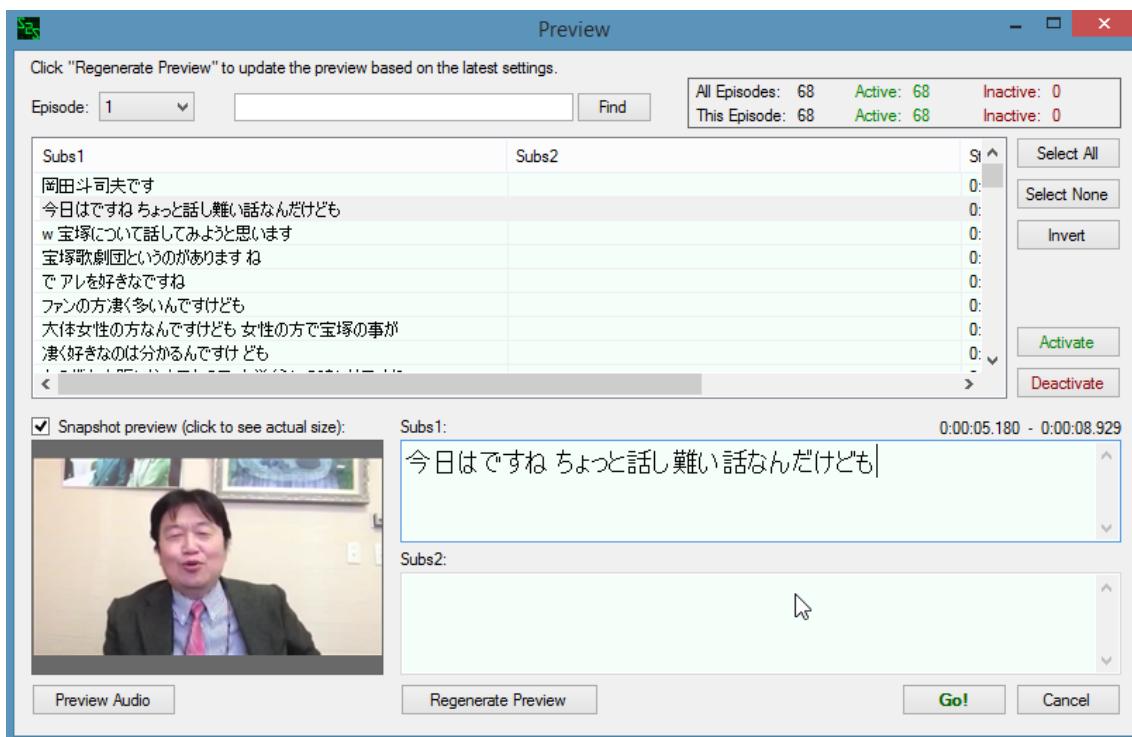


Sweet! Now let's open up [subs2srs](#) again. Once I get everything set up the way I want it, I click “Preview:”



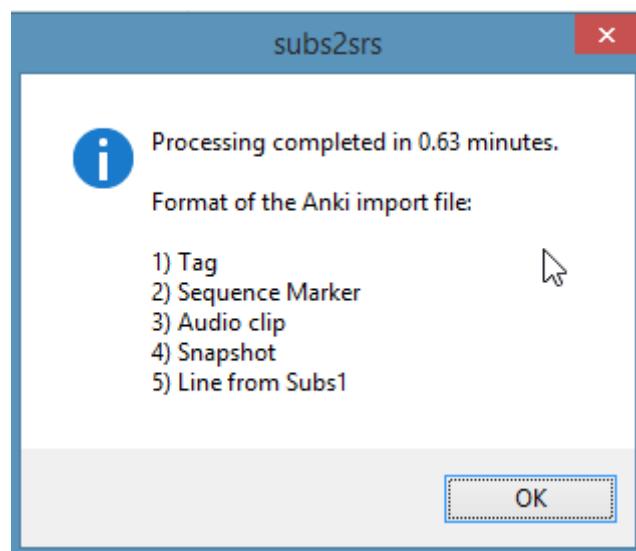
For more info on these settings, please read [the section above](#), or consult with the [subs2srs homepage](#).

Here, I preview some of the audio, which is super native speed—awesome for my study attacks!

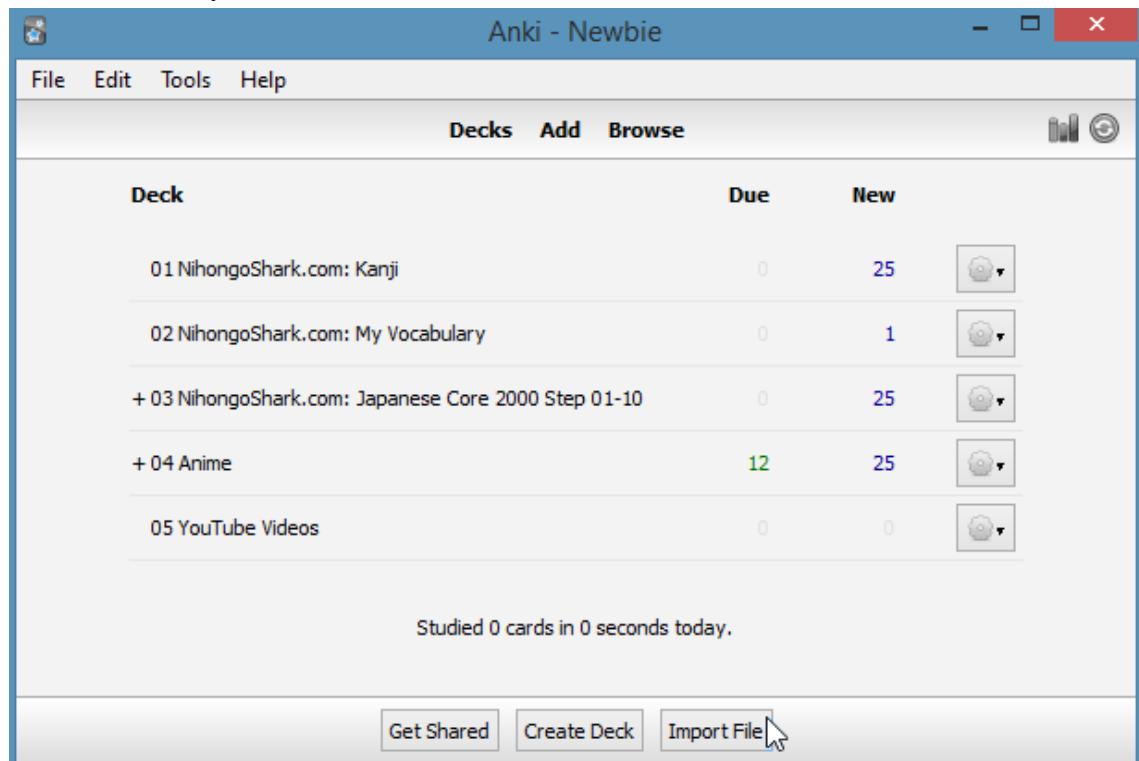


Unfortunately, there are no English subtitles. Some Japanese YouTube videos do have English subtitles, but they tend to be auto-translated, which is usually a nightmare. It's okay to have a video without English subtitles, though, because you can just try to translate the sentences as you review them in your free time... which I'll talk about at the end of this section.

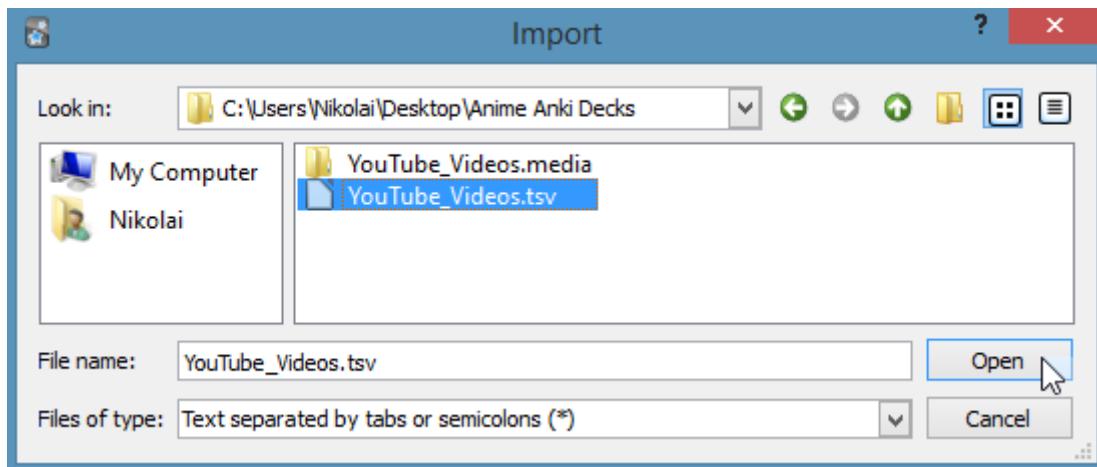
When I click "Go," subs2srs will generate a rad file Anki deck file. As always, I make a note of the card layout:



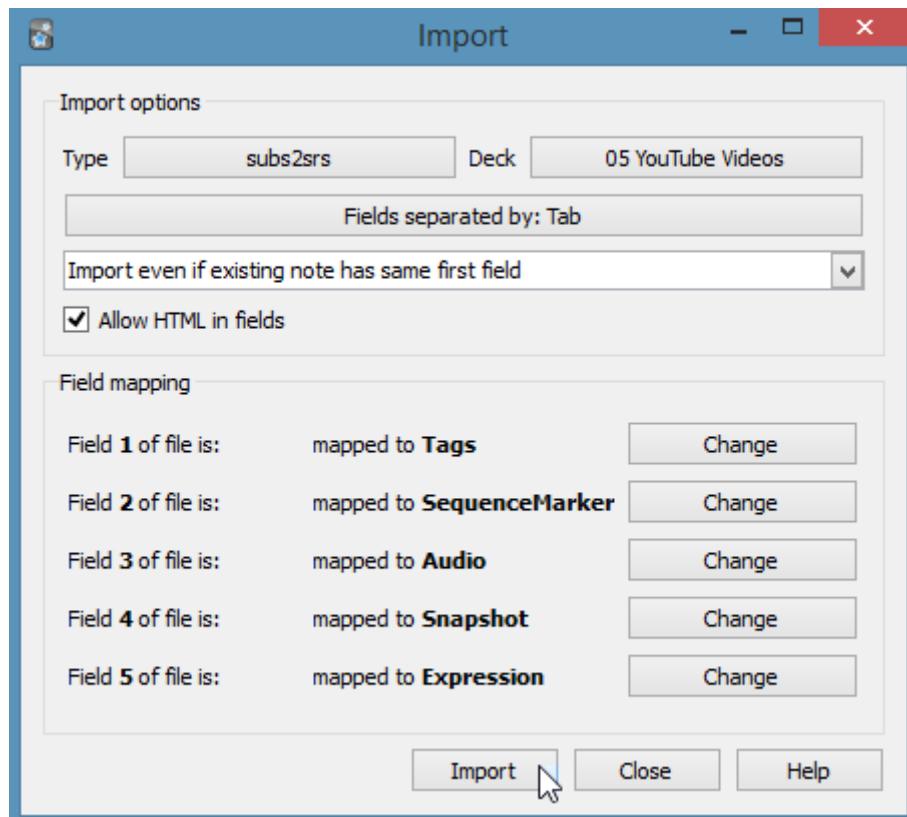
Now I open up Anki so that I can import this beast. As you can see, I've already created a new deck for my YouTube videos:



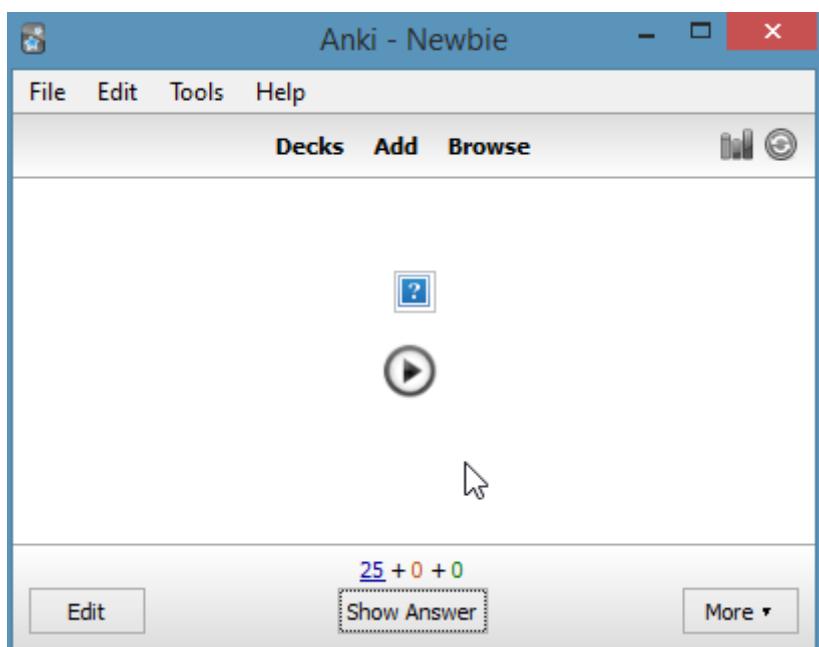
I click on “Import File,” and I’m faced with a familiar screen:



I direct Anki to my newly created YouTube video file, and I click open. Then I select the deck type (subs2srs) and deck (YouTube Videos), and I map the 5 fields of the import file to match the info that subs2srs just gave me:

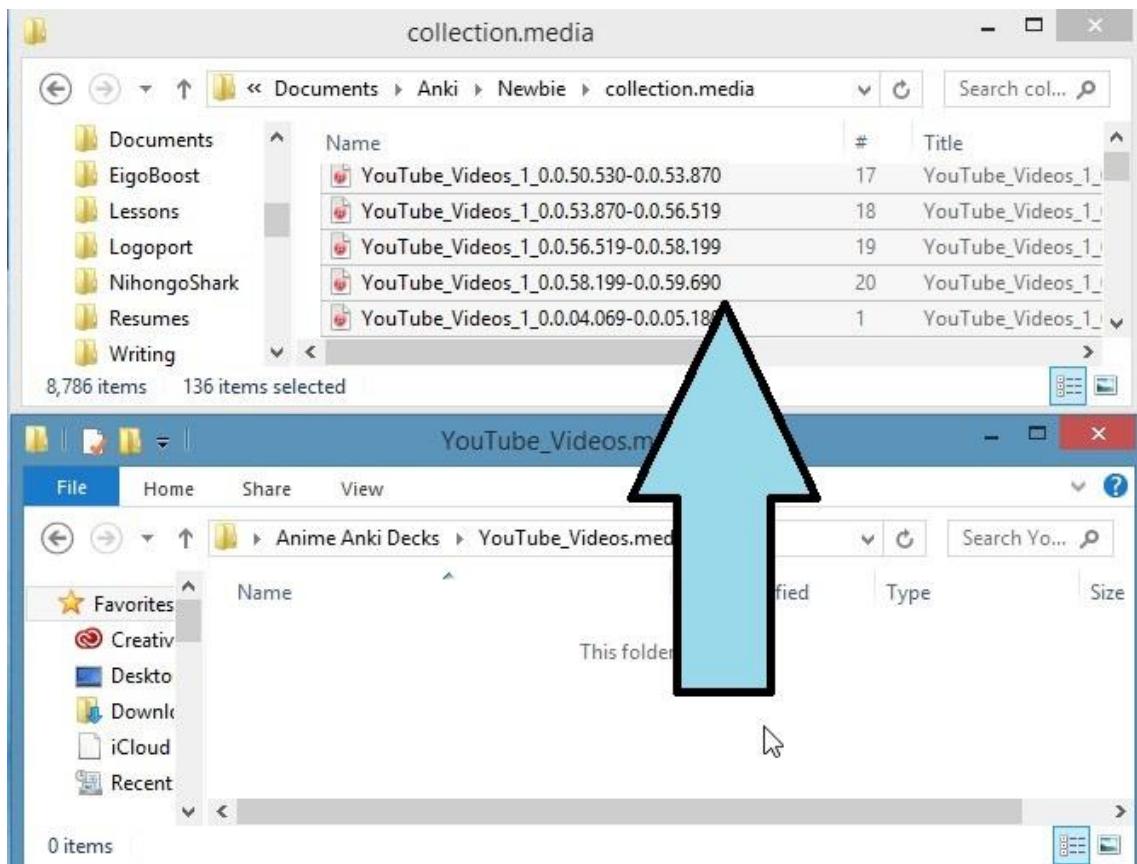


I click “Import” and...



Oh no! There's something wrong with my new cards. Do you remember what?

I still need to copy the media files to my Anki collection folder:



Now I look again, and...



Glorious. I'm gonna get me so much listening practice. Speaking of which, I need to get my priorities in order...

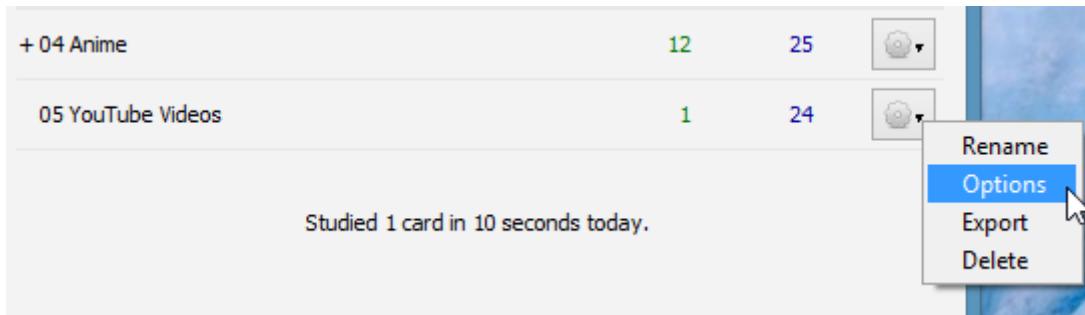
### *Prioritizing subs2srs Flashcards*

Even though I can create a lot of truly magnificent flashcard decks using the technology just described, it's still important that I prioritize my three main decks:

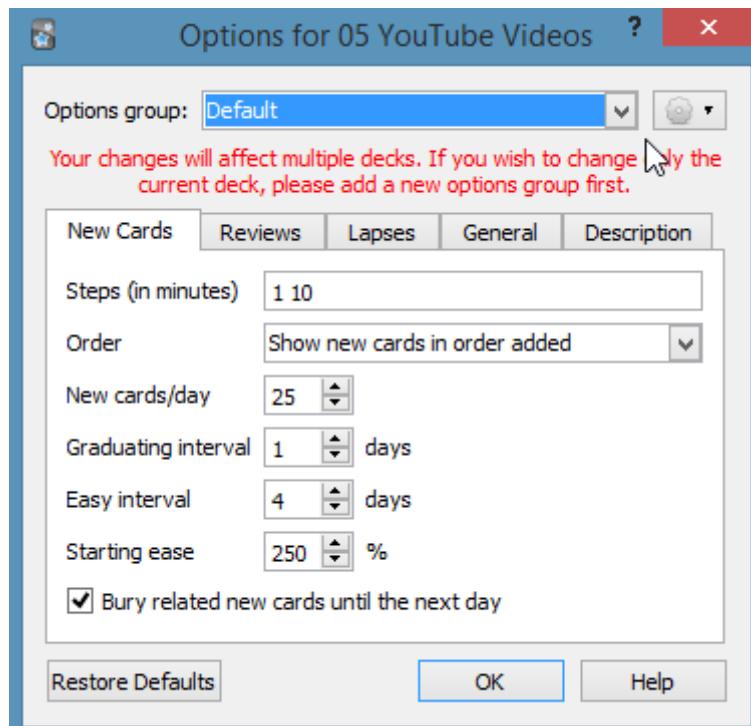
1. Kanji
2. My Vocabulary
3. Pre-Loaded Vocabulary

The main reason for this is that these three decks are so well-structured for a beginner of Japanese. The kanji will make my life a lot easier. My Vocabulary will help me to remember words that I am actually encountering in my real life, and the Pre-Loaded deck will set me up with a solid foundation of the most commonly used words in Japanese.

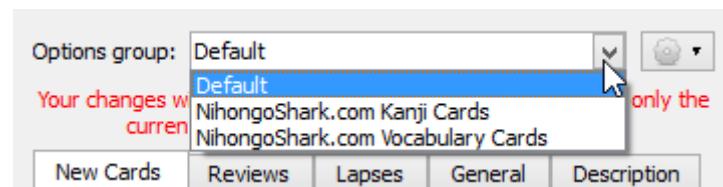
As such, I recommend taking a very laidback approach to your study of subs2srs cards. Don't link them to your chain calendar. Don't pressure yourself to study them every day. Just look at them when you're bored or something. It will probably help if we add a completely different set of options for them, too:



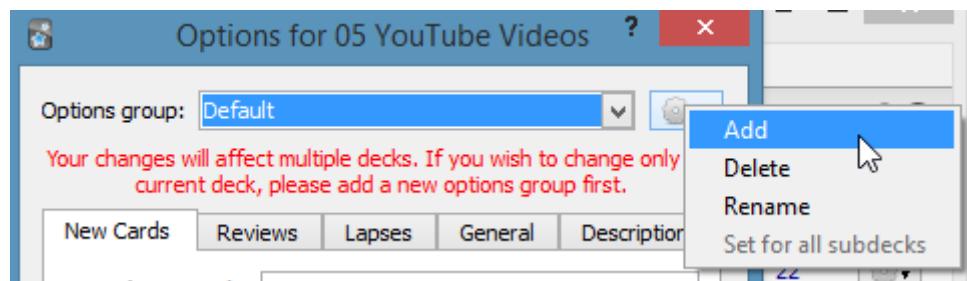
Go to the Options of one of your decks by left-clicking the settings icon shown above. This will bring up the current option settings for this deck:



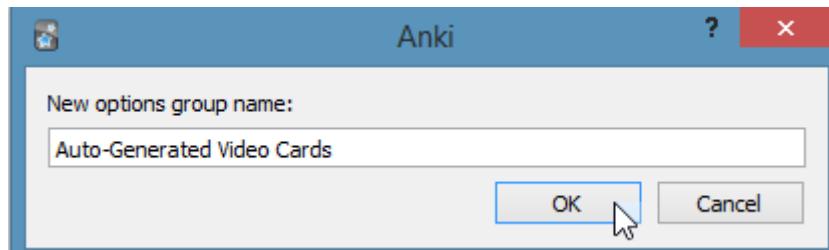
As you can see, this deck is currently set to the “Default” setting. And my only other options are “Kanji” (which is currently set to 22 new cards per day / 9999 reviews) and “Vocabulary” (which is currently set to 25 new cards per day / 9999 reviews):



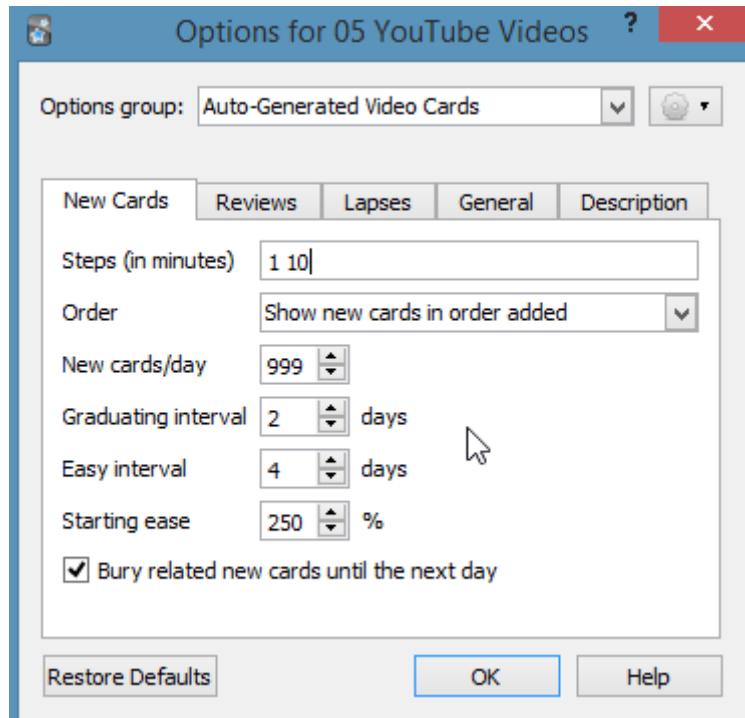
So I click the settings icon instead to make a new options type:



You can call this new Options group whatever you like. I'm calling mine "Auto-Generated Video Cards:"

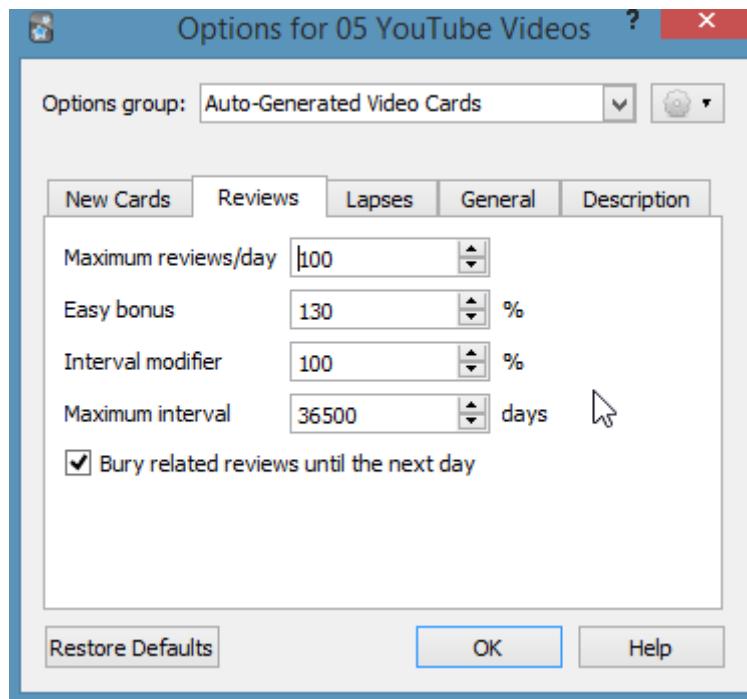


I'm going to set these new options as 999 new cards per day (i.e. until I get tired), with a graduating interval of 2 days (i.e. a longer period between reviews):



For Reviews, I'm going to leave it at a max of 100 per day. Because, why not? I'd rather

see more new card anyways:



After saving these options, I can ascribe them to both my Anime decks and my YouTube Decks. So now I can study as many new cards as I want per day:

Deck	Due	New	
01 NihongoShark.com: Kanji	0	22	
02 NihongoShark.com: My Vocabulary	0	1	
+ 03 NihongoShark.com: Japanese Core 2000 Step 01-10	0	25	
- 04 Anime	12	231	
Shingeki no Kyojin	12	230	
05 YouTube Videos	1	67	

Studied 1 card in 10 seconds today. 

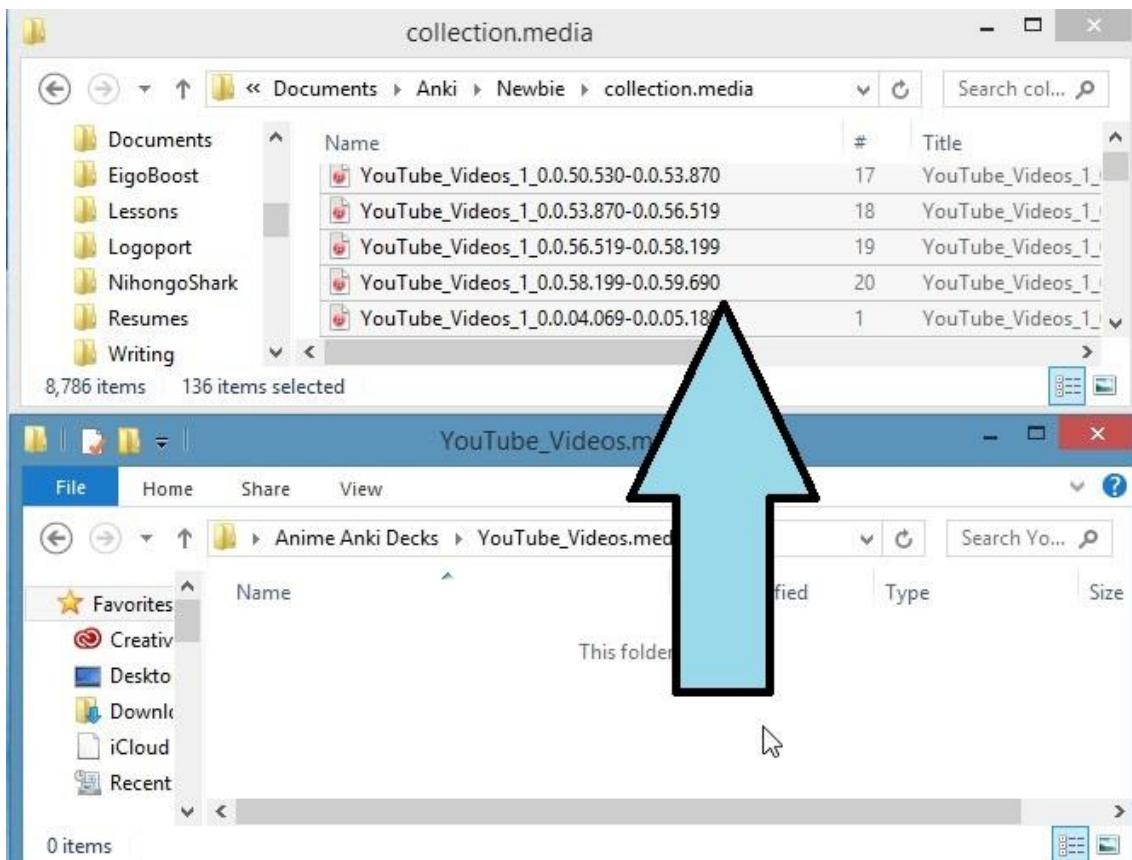
Those numbers don't stress me out, though, because I know that the only ones that really matter are the numbers next to the first three decks—the decks that always take priority.

Anyways, that's about all I've got to say about generating flashcards from videos and studying via anime and YouTube. I hope you enjoyed!

### *Using subs2srs Audio Files for Listening Practice*

There will be some times when you just don't feel like listening to a Japanese audio lesson, but maybe you still want to listen to something productive. Well, I'm not sure whether you've realized this or not, but we just created hundreds of dialogue tracks from anime and YouTube videos.

Remember how I transferred my media collection to my Anki folder? Here is the screenshot:



Well, before transferring those, I could also copy and paste all of those audio files into a separate folder and then put them onto my mobile device(s). Then, the next time I feel like listening to some Japanese, but I don't feel like listening to lessons, I can just review the dialog of my favorite anime show.

You could even try playing these audio tracks every night before you go to bed. Nothing will help you fall asleep like trying to focus on a complicated Japanese sentence taken from, for example, a [YouTube video of a drab TEDx Talk](#) about energy and community independence in Tohoku forests.

Alternatively, there are some programs that will rip the entire audio track off of video files for you. I've found that [TAudioRecorder](#) works well for this.

## Learning Japanese through Video Games—How?!



The first time I tried to play a Japanese video game it was a total disaster. If I remember correctly, I bought a cheap PS2 and one of those classic JRPGs with lots of anime-looking characters, spoken dialog, and turn-based fighting.

It destroyed my brain.

I simply wasn't ready for the level and volume of Japanese that was coming at me at that time... which was pretty disheartening, to be honest. So I gave up on that task. Fast forward a couple of years when I realized that I could play Japanese video games on my mobile device, complete with audio and all that lovely goodness. I wrote an article about it [here](#).

### *Is It Effective?*

I'm not giving a lot of attention to this section of the guide just yet, because I don't really think that Japanese-language video games are effective for improving your Japanese unless you're at a very advanced level already. I'm working on developing some methods for using Japanese games in a way that is entertaining, while remaining time-efficient and easily integrated into a study plan as a whole. If you have any suggestions, please [email me](#). I'm hoping to include this info in the next update of this guide.

## Super List of Auto-Generated Anki Decks

I know what a lot of you have been thinking this entire time—I don't want to do all of that work to make Anki decks, even if they are from my favorite anime. Can't people just upload the decks for me?

Well, I can't really do that, because it would probably violate a lot of copyrights and whatnot. However, it would seem that some vigilante out there named Unoki has read my articles on this topic and uploaded lots of shared decks. Sweet!

So far he/she seems to have uploaded Japanese flashcard decks made with subs2srs for:

- ✧ Japanese Anime
  - The Place Promised In Our Early Days
  - Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood
  - Attack on Titan
- ✧ YouTube Videos
  - A variety of talks from TEDxKyoto

To browse these awesome, media-rich Anki decks, please go to this page:

### Pre-Loaded Anki Media Decks

You can find pre-loaded flashcards decks featuring Japanese anime, YouTube videos, and so on at this page:

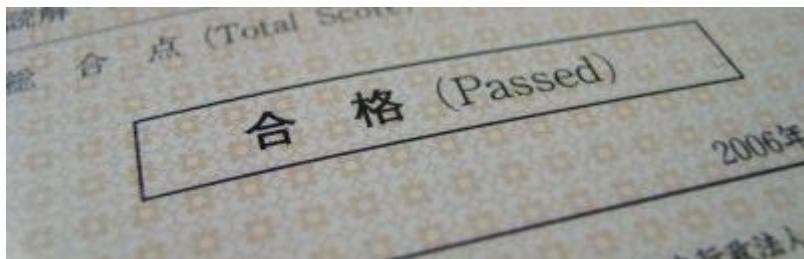
<https://ankiweb.net/shared/decks/unoki>

Conversely, you can just go to [Ankiweb](#) and search for "Unoki:"

Maybe if you make some rad decks, then you could share the love, too, yeah?

## Taking the JLPT

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Most of you probably already know this, but the JLPT is the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, and it's something that students of Japanese love to stress about.

Originally, I was planning to write a whole big section about studying for, taking, and passing the JLPT, but I don't think I'm really the best-suited person for the job... because, quite frankly, I don't care about the JLPT.

Yeah, I took and passed the JLPT. I took and passed N2 in December 2012. Then in July 2014 I took and passed N1, the highest level. But just because I passed the tests does not mean that I am qualified to be giving advice about studying for them, especially seeing as how I never explicitly studied for them.

Saying I never studied for the JLPT is both true and not true. I mean, I studied Japanese vocabulary, grammar, and listening a lot, as I've described in this guide. And sometimes I did that using JLPT textbooks, because they seemed to have concise info about study topics I needed to focus on. But I never read up on question format, test-taking strategies, or any of that stuff which actually will improve your score.

I always figured that I should be able to pass the test without studying for it specifically, because surely a native Japanese speaker would have no problem passing it, right? That's why I just walked into the test blindly to see how I fared. And, lucky me, I was 2 for 2! Sweet!

But maybe you want to pass the JLPT because you want to work for a Japanese company or get a scholarship or something. In that case, I would definitely recommend studying up

on it ahead of time. For example, when I first took JLPT N2, I didn't really know anything about the test, so I totally ran out of time on the reading section, because I wasn't expecting the reading passages to get longer towards the end of the test. I still passed, but I would have passed by a much larger margin had I been more prepared. Oops.

Preparing for a test is also an awesome way to motivate yourself to study and to track your progress. So that's a benefit, too.

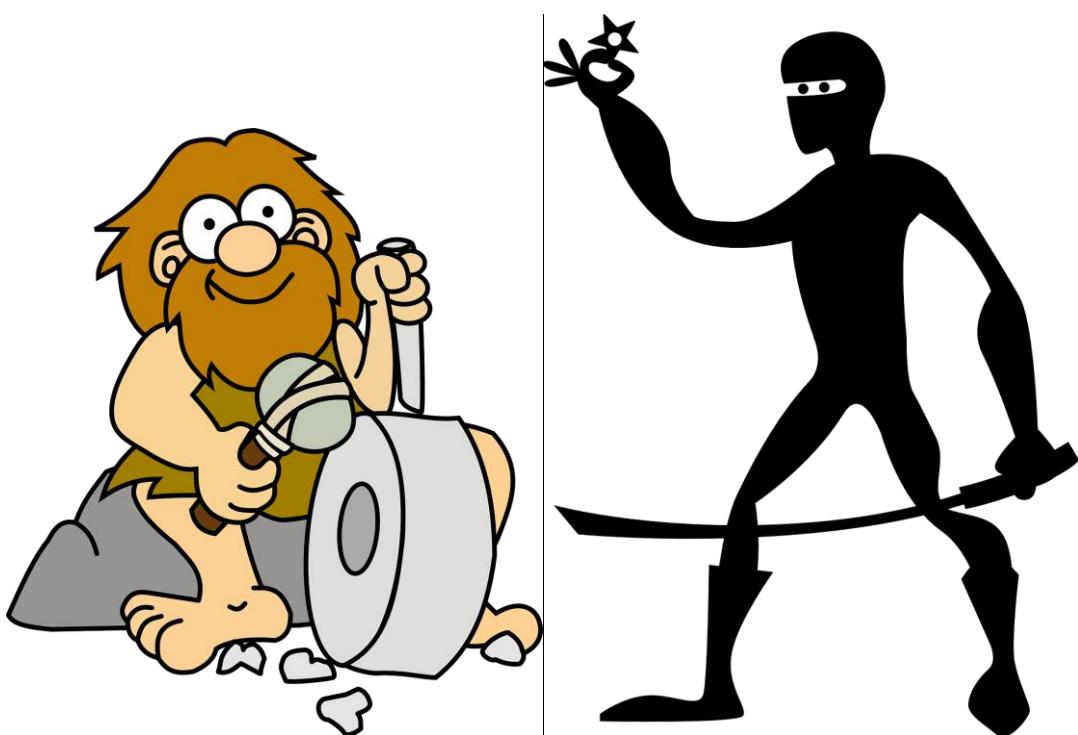
For more information, you should check out these other websites by people who are a lot more familiar with the test than I am:

- ✧ [The Japan Foundation](#): This is the official site for the JLPT.
- ✧ [Wikipedia – JLPT](#): This is the Wikipedia article about the test.
- ✧ [The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles](#): The official US site for the JLPT.
- ✧ [JLPT Boot Camp](#): This site is totally dedicated to studying for the JLPT.

Good luck, test takers!

# CAVEMAN CONVERSATION START-UP GUIDE

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This section will walk you through how to start having basic, caveman-like conversation in Japanese within one week of studying.

It may seem like having a 1-week conversation startup guide is conflicting with the advice that I've given so far in the guide (where speaking isn't really a *requirement* at all for the first year). But like I said, the sooner you start speaking regularly, the sooner your conversation skills will improve. It's as simple as that.

But having conversations in a language that you don't know is very, very intimidating.

It's downright scary. Because of that, I can't really give you clear advice on when you should start practicing your conversation skills. I would say *when you feel ready*, but, realistically, you're never going to feel ready. I still don't feel ready when I have to make a phone call in Japanese, even though I've done it so many times before. The main reason that I created this series of lessons is that I wanted readers to have something to give them a little confidence boost for going into their first lesson. I hope that it proves useful to you.

Keep swimming!

Specifically, the Caveman Conversation Course Covers:

- ✧ Super basic greetings.
- ✧ In-lesson survival phrases:
  - “How do I say...?”
  - “What does X mean?”
  - “One more time, please.”
  - “Please speak slower.”
  - “Okay, I understand.”
  - “I don’t understand.”
  - “In English, please.”

To be completely honest, you don't really have to prepare at all for your first lesson, because that's your teacher's problem, but you'll probably have a much better experience if you do...

## Mental Preparation

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Before we look at the survival Japanese that we'll need for speaking Japanese, let's get psyched about taking lessons!

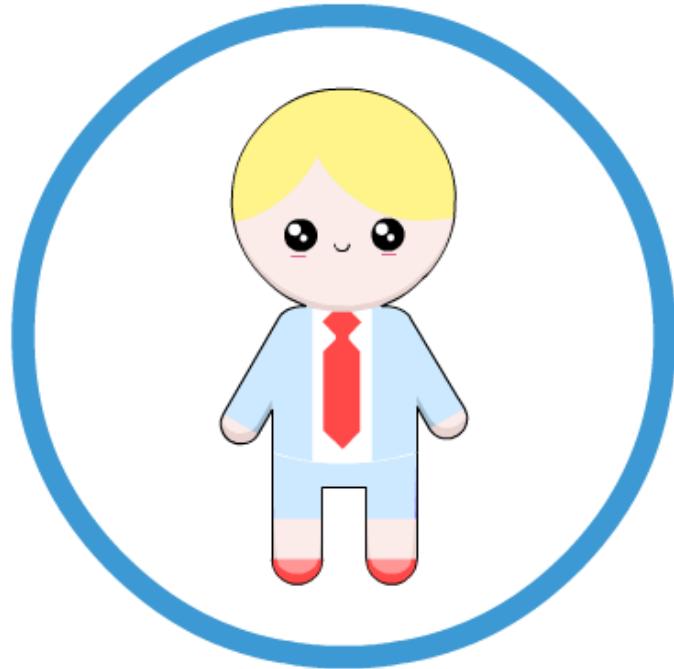
### *Expand Your Comfort Zone*

Taking a language lesson is scary. I think that it's especially intimidating for introverted people, which [I talked about earlier](#) in Phase #3. If you look at that section of the guide, there are some tips for making lessons seem less intimidating as a whole. Still, it's unlikely that you'll be able to eliminate your initial discomfort completely. That's OK.

Who cares if you're uncomfortable?

Let's say that everything in this circle is in your comfort zone:

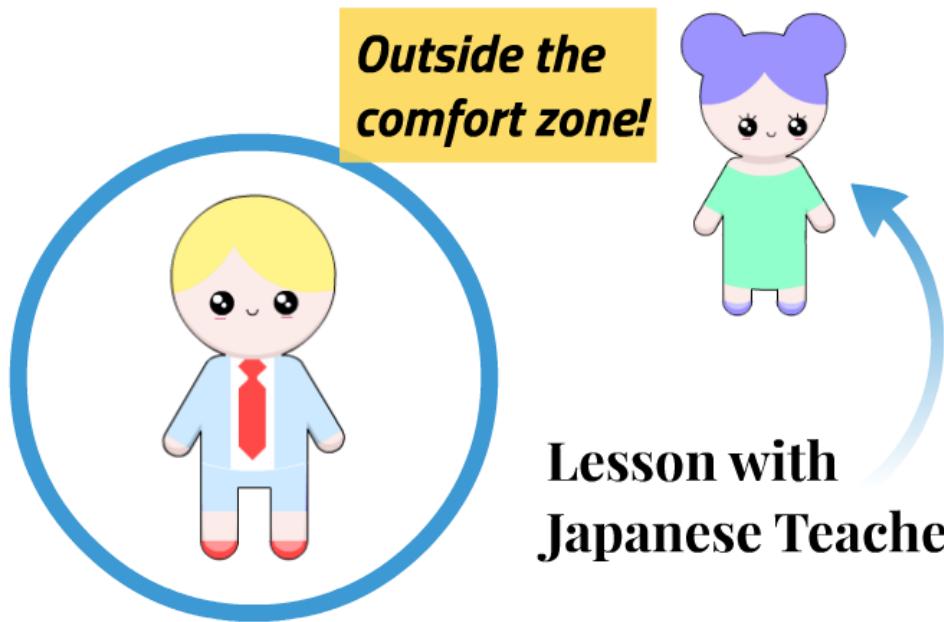
## In your **comfort zone.**



It's nice inside of your comfort zone. You feel safe, at home. There's nothing to worry about.

There's one huge problem with this, though: **You cannot grow unless you get out of your comfort zone.** Disruption is a catalyst for growth. The more you expose yourself to a certain type of discomfort, the more you will adapt to be OK with it.

So let's say you read this guide, and you've decided that you're going to take a Japanese lesson online. Nice! But there's only one problem: Taking an online lesson is way out of your comfort zone. You're not even comfortable having a face-to-face chat online, let alone *in Japanese*. Agh!



Stepping out of your comfort zone is scary. Luckily, you can just get out of it in small steps, powered by 20-second spurts of insane courage (an idea I got from Matt Damon's character in [We Bought a Zoo](#), and talked about in [this Huffington Post article](#)).

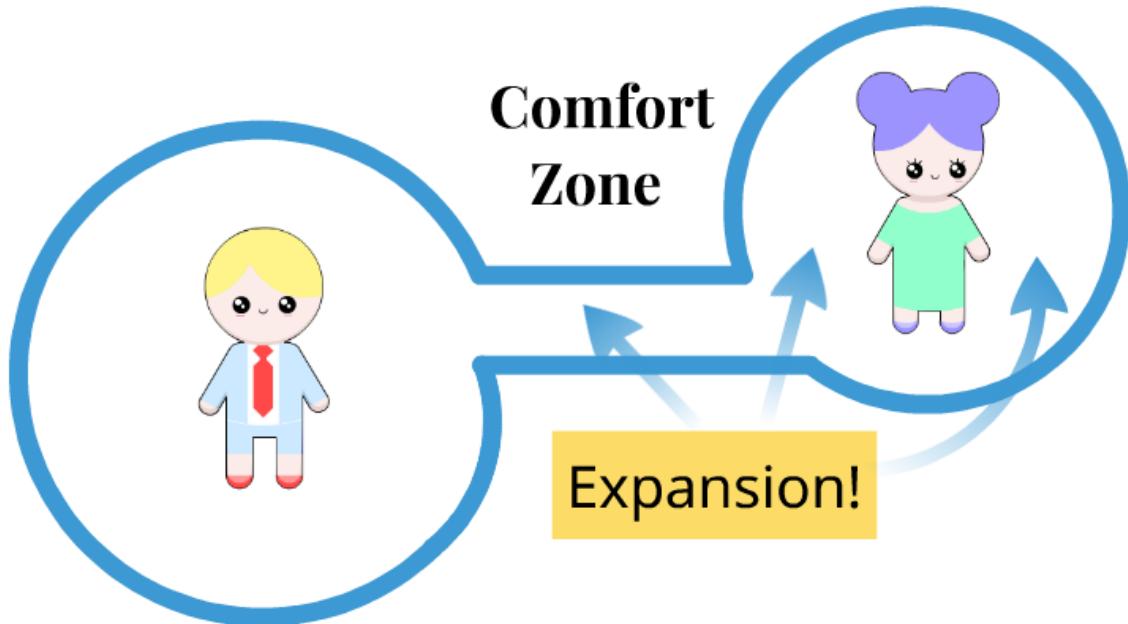
Building up to a lesson using 20-second bursts of bravery. Each item only takes a few seconds, and all you need is 20 seconds of insane courage to do each one:

1. Hit the “Schedule a Lesson” button for your chosen teacher on italki or Cafetalk.
2. Open Skype at the designated lesson time.
3. Hit “Answer Call” when your teacher calls you. (You don’t even need to answer with video, if you’re feeling particularly shy or nervous. Sometimes my Japanese students of English do this, too, so they (the student) can see me, but I (the teacher) can’t see them. Little do they know that I’m using a 20-second burst of insane courage myself when I hit the “Call” button to start their lesson.)

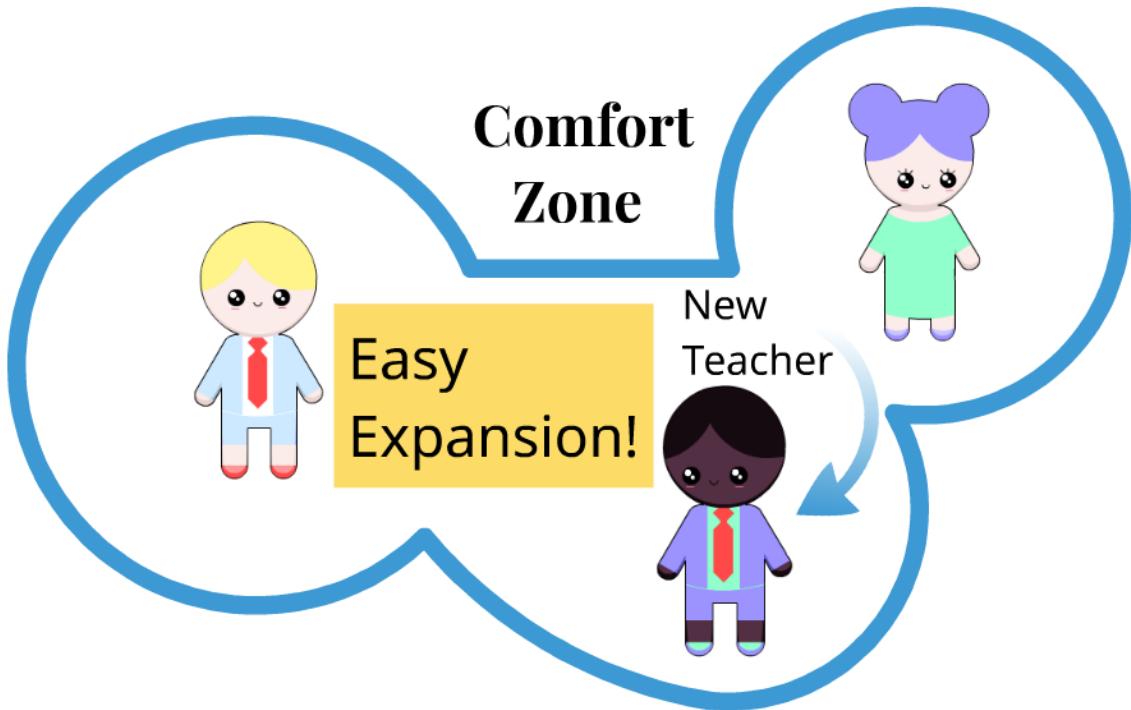
That’s all you really need to do in order to take a lesson. You don’t need this guide. You don’t need to know or speak any Japanese. Yeah, I think that this conversation guide will be of great use to you, as well as the [lesson preparation tips](#) described in Phase #3.

Ultimately, though, you already have all of the tools and preparation you need to start taking online lessons (assuming that you have a reliable, high-speed internet connection).

Once you start taking a few online lessons, you may find that your comfort zone's shape begins to change, and it will start looking like this:



Before you know it, meeting with your teacher won't feel uncomfortable at all. Maybe instead it'll feel closer to something like going to coffee with an old friend. Also, the experience of getting out of your comfort zone will make you better at getting out of your comfort zone in the future. For example, let's say you want to try a new teacher. That might still be a bit out of your comfort zone, but it will still be much easier than the original burst of courage that you needed for your first lesson:



In this way, learning a new language can improve not only your language skill, but also your social skills in general. I know that for me personally, teaching English (which is sort of the inverse of this) has helped me to expand my general comfort zone and improve my social skills immeasurably. It's one of the greatest things that I've gotten out of teaching.

So what are you waiting for? Build up a 20-second burst of insane courage and schedule your first Japanese lesson already.

### *Learn to Love Making Mistakes*

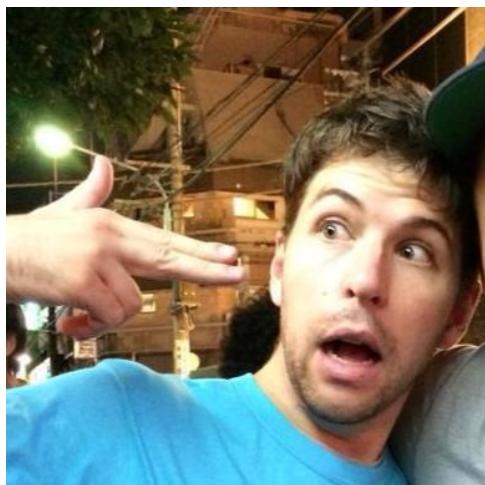
There's this horrible loop that I have gotten stuck in more times than I count:

*The worse I am at language, the more afraid I am of making mistakes in that language. And yet, the worse I am at a language the more I need to be making mistakes in that language.*

So in January 2013 I moved to Tokyo.

It was my second time living in Japan, as a couple of years before that I had studied at a

Japanese language school for six months in Shinjuku. The thing is, when I left that language school four years ago and moved back to California, I quit studying Japanese. Then, here I was: in Japan again. And I met up with some former classmates who had kept studying that whole time, and **they were way better at Japanese than I was.**



*Honestly, I was embarrassed.*  
And so whenever I went out with them and our Japanese friends, *I was hesitant* to say anything, because I didn't want them to hear any of my mistakes. *I was self-conscious* every time I didn't understand something people were saying. I knew that I needed to be making more mistakes, but that's really intimidating when you're surrounded by people who are better than you.

The reason I bring up this story is because,

looking back at it now, I had no reason to be embarrassed. I've had these talks again and again with my Japanese students when teaching English, and I always tell them the same thing. I tell them what I tell myself every time I'm afraid of looking stupid, making a mistake, any time I'm embarrassed that I'm not as good as the people around me, the same thing [I wrote earlier in Phase #3](#):

**(1) Think about how you feel when you're around somebody who's much better than you at something. Does it make you feel good? Probably not.**

***On the other hand, (2) think about how you feel when you're around somebody who's not as good as you at something. How does that make you feel? Proud of yourself? Confident? Happy?***

***Finally, (3) how do you want the people around you to feel? Most likely, you want to make them feel happy, proud of themselves, confident. And you can't do that by being perfect. So don't try to be perfect.***

Being bad at something is an awesome opportunity to lift up the people around you, to make them feel awesome.

And you can ask them for help or advice and make them feel skilled and valuable. Stealing an idea from [Benny the Irish polyglot](#), you can tell your Japanese friends that you'll buy them a drink if they correct your broken Japanese five times. You give your Japanese girlfriend/boyfriend a kiss on the cheek every time she/he corrects you.

In stories, the best characters are flawed. But usually they have a good heart. I'd like to think that it's the same in life, too.

So let's speak some Japanese and look as stupid as possible, yeah? Let's laugh at ourselves and have a good time. To build a bit of confidence, a good place to start is in a controlled environment, such as a lesson with a teacher who will correct your errors... exactly what we're preparing for right now!

## Caveman Japanese Conversation Guide

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Ready or not, here we go. Let's get some basic Japanese in our brain that will get us through our first few attempts at speaking practice in a lesson or language exchange...

### *Lesson #1 – Konnichiwa*

Most of you probably already know this, but こんにちは/ *Konnichiwa* is the word for hello in Japanese. Your first lesson will probably start by you and your teacher saying this to each other like eight or nine times in a row. I don't know what it is about Japanese people, but they say greetings over and over again. Just wait until you say bye to a Japanese friend, be it a language exchange partner or your teacher. I would bet you money that they say "Bye," or some equivalent, *at least* three times before walking away, ending the Skype session, etc.

こんにちは

[Hello.](#)

Be careful about the pronunciation of こんにちは / *Konnichiwa*, because a lot of foreigners wrongly say こにちは / *Konichiwa*. We need that extra "n" sound in こんにちは / *Konnichiwa*.

A written explanation probably doesn't help much, though. So let's listen to people say it over and over again. [Here is a YouTube video](#) in which a Japanese teacher talks about こんにちは / *Konnnichiwa*. She also talks about おはようございます / *Ohayou gozaimasu* / "Good morning," こんばんは / *Konban wa* / "Good evening," おやすみなさい / *Oyasuminasai* / "Goodnight." Feel free to learn those while you're at it, if you'd like.

I want to stress that you should try to get your pronunciation of こんにちは / *konnichiwa* to sound as natural as possible. To help, I have taken the audio of that YouTube teacher saying *konnichiwa* and looped it into an audio track with a metronome. Listen to this about ten times, and you should have a pretty solid grasp of the correct pronunciation:



#### [Konnichiwa Pronunciation Practice Clip](#)

You'll notice that while she (the teacher) says this with nice, clean, slow pronunciation, the guy she is talking to uses a lazy, almost-abridged version that sounds like こんちわ / *konchiwa*. Notice also that they both stress and draw out the *wa* at the end. Listen, listen. Imitate, Imitate.

By the way, I can take the audio off of a YouTube video by using the [4K Video Downloader](#) discussed in the [section of the guide where I explain ripping YouTube videos to Anki flashcard decks](#), then I can edit the audio file using the program [Audacity](#). Both of these programs are free.

If you want to add a bit of flavor, you could also ask your teacher how he's doing by saying 元気ですか / *Genki desu ka* / "How are you?"

Technically, 元気 / Genki means something like “doing well; healthy.” です / desu is the “to be” verb of Japanese, and か / ka is a question marker.

げんき  
元気ですか

Healthy + Is + (You)? → How are you?

In English, we'd say something like “I'm good,” or “I'm fine.” In Japanese, you can just shoot back with げんき 元気です / Genki desu. By dropping the か / ka, this is no longer a question. In other words, you're saying “healthy” + “to be” → I'm healthy → I'm good.

げんき  
元気です

Healthy + Is + (Me). → I'm good.

And since your teacher is such a nice person, maybe he or she will ask you the same exact thing:

げんき  
元気ですか

Healthy + Is + (You)? → How are you?

And then you can just copy him:

げんき  
元気です

Healthy + Is + (Me). → I'm good.

<b>A:</b>	こんにちは。	<i>Konnichiwa</i>	Hello.
<b>B:</b>	こんにちは。	<i>Konnichiwa</i>	Hello.
<b>A:</b>	げんき 元気ですか。	<i>Genki desu ka?</i>	How are you?

<b>B:</b>	げんき 元気です。 げんき 元気ですか	<i>Genki desu.</i> <i>Genki desu ka?</i>	I'm good. How about you?
<b>A:</b>	げんき 元気です。	<i>Genki desu.</i>	I'm good.

Most exciting conversation of all time, right? If you want to make it more casual, then you can just drop all the です and ですか business:

<b>A:</b>	こんにちは。	<i>Konnichiwa</i>	Hey.
<b>B:</b>	こんにちは。	<i>Konnichiwa</i>	Hi.
<b>A:</b>	げんき 元気?	<i>Genki?</i>	How are you?
<b>B:</b>	げんき げんき 元気。元気?	<i>Genki. Genki?</i>	I'm good. You?
<b>A:</b>	げんき 元気。	<i>Genki.</i>	I'm good.

[Here's a YouTube video](#) by [JapanesePod101](#) that explains everything in this lesson.

There's also a free [udemy](#) course that talks about a lot of this basic stuff.

If all of that seems pretty clear, then...Boom! Lesson #1 is complete. Just like that.

Next we have...

### *Lesson #2 – Simple First Time Greeting*

As soon as you and your teacher finish saying hello to each other 37 times, the next phrase that's likely to pop up is はじめまして / *hajimemashite*. There's no really good equivalent for this in English. Technically it means something like "I am meeting you

はじ  
for the first time (初め / *hajime* means "first time). If you look at a Japanese-English

dictionary, then it will say something like “Nice to meet you.” I suspect that this is the culprit behind Japanese people’s obsession with saying “Nice to meet you” in English before they even know your name.

This is the usual flow of a first-time meeting in Japanese (in a formal setting):

A:	はじ 初めまして	<i>hajimemashite</i>	Hello (for the first time ever!)
B:	はじ 初めまして	<i>hajimemashite</i>	Hello (for the first time ever!)
A:	Niko です	<i>Niko desu</i>	I’m Niko.
B:	レイです	<i>Rei desu</i>	I’m Rei.
A:	よろ ねが 宜しくお願 いします	<i>yoroshiku onegaishimasu</i>	Nice to meet you.
B:	よろ ねが 宜しくお願 いします	<i>yoroshiku onegaishimasu</i>	Nice to meet you.

Let’s look at this conversation in a bit more depth...

はじ  
初めまして

Like I said earlier, this just means “I’m meeting you for the first time.” The reason that I don’t include こんにちは / *konnichiwa* in this section is that you don’t necessarily need to say it before はじめまして / *konnichiwa*. It’s okay if you do, but it’s not required. That’s why I translated this as “Hello (for the first time ever).”

[Name]です

です / *desu* is kind of like English’s “to be” verb, and in much the same way, it can be used to say about a million things. The simplest construct is the one we see here:

[Noun] + です = ...is noun.

Notice anything strange about that sentence? I haven't written a subject for either one. You could think of this sentence as having an unspoken subject, which a lot of

textbooks will say is 私は / *watashi wa*.

私 / *watashi* means "I." and は *wa* is a topic-marking particle (don't worry about it). If I wanted to include "I," which is totally unnecessary, I could say:

わたし に こ  
私はニコです。  
*watashi wa Niko desu.*

I am Niko.

A lot of people, in explaining the first-time greetings written above, will write something like this:

わたし に こ  
(私は)ニコです。  
*(watashi wa) Niko desu.*

(I) am Niko.

That's probably a totally sufficient explanation. However, if you're going to get technical about what is and is not the subject of this sentence, things could get pretty complicated. If you're an intermediate student or above, Jay Rubin's [Making Sense of Japanese](#) has a very interesting explanation of this, in which he talks about "the zero pronoun" of Japanese.

If you're at a Japanese school, they will probably press you to say 私 / *watashi*, and I guess it is technically more polite. Personally, I try to avoid saying "I" whenever possible in Japanese, and I think that as a result I've developed an aversion for the word 私 (or any of the many other forms of self-address in Japanese). Say it if you want. But

you're not incorrect by not saying it... and that sounds easier to me.

よろ  
ねが

宜しくお願いします

ねが

The word **お願い** / *onegai* means “favor.” So if you add the verb する / *suru* to it, which in this case is conjugated to します / *shimasu*, “to do,” then you get “do a favor.” This is one of the many ways to say “please” in Japanese.

よろ

**宜しく** / *yoroshiku*, however, is a much less easily defined word in English. I've seen it translated into all of these things:

- ❖ best regards
- ❖ please remember me
- ❖ please treat me favorably
- ❖ please take care of
- ❖ I'm counting on you

Generally speaking, my sense of **よろしく** / *yoroshiku* is that it means something like “Please be nice to me” or “Please do [nice thing] for me.”

So if we add all of this together, we get: “Please be nice to me please.” Beautiful English, right? Because of its contextual use, however, it gets translated to become “Nice to meet you.” I guess the nuance is something like, “Let's have a good relationship from here on out.”

## *Lesson #2 – Super Simple Self-Intro*

じこしょうかい

I get so many Japanese students of English that want to practice their **自己紹介** / *jikoshoukai* / “Self-Introductions.” Actually, one of the most popular posts on my websites [EigoBoost.com](http://EigoBoost.com) is [英語での自己紹介の例文や自然な言い方](#) / “How to Give a Natural Self-Introduction in English, with Example Sentences.”

When I first went to a Japanese language school in Tokyo, they went around the class

and made everyone give them as well. They do it in companies, too. I don't know about the rest of the English-speaking world, but I'm pretty sure that this would be self-introduction overkill in America, especially because a standard self-introduction could include all of this information:

はじ 初めまして。	<i>hajimemashite</i>	Hello (for the first time ever!).
ニコです。	<i>Niko desu</i>	I'm Niko.
あめりか アメリカの カリフオルニア州 からきました。	<i>Amerika no kariforunia shuu kara kimashita</i>	I'm from California.
えいごきょうし 英語教師です	<i>eigo kyoushi desu</i>	I'm an English teacher.
よろしくおねがい します	<i>yoroshiku onegaishimasu</i>	Nice to meet you.

I don't know why, but I really don't like making self-introductions. Usually, if someone (a Japanese teacher, for example) asks me to give one, I'll give an even shorter one than what I've written above. I think that's great advice for an absolute beginner, too, because you don't have to worry about not being able to give a full self-introduction. Just say your name, and that should be no problem:

はじ 初めまして。	<i>hajimemashite</i>	Hello (for the first time ever!).
ニコです。	<i>Niko desu</i>	I'm Niko.

よろしくおねがい します	<i>yoroshiku onegaishimasu</i>	Nice to meet you.
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If your teacher presses you for more, then you can just get him or her to teach you more. That's his/her job, after all, right?

If you want a nice, detailed Japanese lesson, I think that [this YouTube lesson](#) by [KemushiChan](#) is pretty solid.

*Lesson #3 – Lesson Survival Phrase #1: "How do you say...?"*

To close this short conversation guide, I'm going to give you a few phrases that can be lifesavers when talking to a teacher. These are particularly useful if you decide to take Japanese lessons with a teacher who doesn't speak very good English.

X は何と言いますか。

*X wa nan to iimasuka?*

**How do you say X?**

You're probably best off just memorizing this flat out. 何, which is sometimes pronounced なん / *nan* and sometimes pronounced なに / *nani*, means "what."

い  
言う / *iu* means "to say." And here we have the –masu form, which is 言います.

と / *to* is a particle that is used to mark stuff sometimes. I could explain it in confusing detail, but suffice it to say that sometimes when you stick it after a noun, it's like putting quotation marks around that word. So in this example, it would be like putting quotes around "何." Confusing? Yeah, then don't worry about. That's a topic for a much later lesson.

Check [this video](#) for pronunciation. In it, she slips in **日本語で** / *nihongo de*, which means “in Japanese:”

**X は日本語で何と言いますか。**

*X wa nihongo de nan to iimasuka?*

**How do you say X in Japanese?**

Originally I left out “in Japanese,” because it should be obvious. But maybe a little

clarity is a good thing, so let’s memorize this with **日本語で** / *nihongo de* included.

To prepare, just practice saying this sentence 28,000 times, inserting new things for X every time:

X	にほんご なん い X は日本語で何と言 いますか	<i>X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka</i>	How do you say X in Japanese?
cat	にほんご なん い Cat は日本語で何と言 いますか	<i>X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka</i>	How do you say cat in Japanese?
scissors	にほんご Scissors は日本語で なん い 何と言いますか	<i>X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka</i>	How do you say scissors in Japanese?

unemployment	Unemployment は 日本語で何と言いま すか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say unemployment in Japanese?
painful	Painful は日本語で何 と言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say painful in Japanese?
green tea	Green tea は日本語で 何と言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say green tea in Japanese?
tissue	Tissue は日本語で何 と言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say tissue in Japanese?
idiot	Idiot は日本語で何と 言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say idiot in Japanese?
friend	Friend は日本語で何 と言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say friend in Japanese?
snow	Snow は日本語で何と 言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say snow in Japanese?

weird	にほんごなん Weird は日本語で何とい 言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say weird in Japanese?
forget	にほんごなん Forget は日本語で何とい 言いますか	X wa nihongo de nan to iimasu ka	How do you say forget in Japanese?

By the way, here are the answers:

cat	ねこ 猫	neko
scissors	はさみ	hasami
unemployment	しつぎょう 失業	shitsugyou
painful	いた 痛い	itai
green tea	りょくちや 緑茶	ryokucha
tissue	ティッシュ	tisshu
idiot	バカ	baka
friend	ともだち 友達	tomodachi
snow	ゆき 雪	yuki
weird	へん 変	hen
forget	わす 忘れる	wasureru

If you get a teacher who understands English well, you can now ask them what pretty much anything means. For example...

「I was hungover」は日本語で何と言いますか

How do you say “I was hungover” in Japanese?

Hangover / Hungover is 二日酔い / *futsuka yoi*, by the way. Add です / *desu* or だ / *da* to make it present tense. Or you can add でした / *deshita* (formal) or だった / *datta* (common; casual) to make it past tense:

ふつかよ 二日酔いだ	ふつかよ 二日酔いです	ふつかよ 二日酔いでした	ふつかよ 二日酔いだった
I'm hungover.	I'm hungover.	I was hungover.	I was hungover.

Most of you probably won't need that for your first lesson, I'm hoping. You never know, though...

*Lesson #4 – Lesson Survival Phrase #2: “What does X mean?”*

Now that we've gone over “How do you say X,” all that's left is the phrase “What does X mean?” With these two phrases, you should be able to ask a Japanese person (who's pretty good at English) what *anything* means. In theory, with these two phrases **you can already have a full conversation entirely in Japanese**. Yeah, it might a very painful conversation, and you're probably going to sound like a Neanderthal. But that's chill, yo. No worries.

いみ  
X はどういう意味ですか。

*X wa dou iu imi desu ka*

What does X mean?

Let's look at a breakdown.

## X

---

“X” means “sea monster” in Japanese.

No, I’m just kidding. X means X.

Although, while we’re on the topic, do you know how a Japanese person would

pronounce the following symbol:  ??

How about this one:  ??

 = ばつ = *batsu* = “wrong; incorrect; bad.”

 = まる = *maru* = “right; correct.”

If you ever take a test in Japanese, you should hope to get back a paper with lots of  and not a paper with lots of .

Japanese people will also often hold their fingers up like an “X” to indicate that you can’t or shouldn’t do something. One time I was about to pick up a little box of strawberries at Tsukiji fish market, and owner of the stall I was at crossed his arms into an “X.” That’s when you know stuff’s getting really serious. A very traumatic experience for me.

Also, getting further sidetracked, did you know that Japanese borrows the English word trauma? Only, their awesome rendition of English pronunciation makes it into トライア / *to-ra-u-ma* / “trauma.”

While we might say something like, “It was a traumatic experience,” in Japanese they would say something like トライアになつた / *torauma ni natta*, which literally means “It became trauma.” I was looking around on [Ameblo](#), and I saw [this blog post](#), which had the following sentence construction with トライア:

いぜん れんあい とらうま  
以前の恋愛がトラウマになって  
ひと あい おも  
もう人を愛することはない💔と思つていた  
*izen no renai ga torauma ni natte*  
*mou hito wo ai suru koto wa nai to omotte ita*  
**Traumatized by a past love,  
she had thought that she'd never love again.**

Okay, I'll stop being sidetracked now. Sorry...

[どういう](#)

I don't want to get into the habit of ascribing English words to every piece of a Japanese sentence that you come across, because it starts to be kind of a waste of time after a while. For the purposes of this guide, however, I thought that it might be helpful to break down each sentence thoroughly so that absolute beginners might feel just a little bit less overwhelmed by all of these strange sounds that I'm asking you to string together.

どう / *dou* basically means "how." And いう is the same 言う / *iu* we saw before, which means "to say," right?

When the two are put together, they make their own unique word, どういう / *douiu*, which dictionaries kind of struggle to explain, calling it "somehow; how; in what way; why; what kind of."

A lot of times, Japanese people will say どういうこと? / *douiu koto?*

こと / *koto* means "thing," so if you translated this directly it would be something like "How thing?" Instead, we can put it into more natural English and say something like "What the heck?"

Though it's not strictly necessary, if you're a guy, I'd recommending sticking a だ

onto the end of that, to get:

どういうことだ？

*douiu koto da?*

**What the heck?**

If you're super shocked about something, put いつたい / *ittai* in front of it. This sounds a bit more like...

いつたいどういうことだ？

*ittai douiu koto da?*

**What on earth? / What the hell? / What the f\*&%?!**

You hear this a lot in anime. I suppose it's because something unexpected is happening every 3 seconds or so. In such cases, いう / *iu* is likely to be pronounced ウ / *yu*.

I'm sidetrack city in this section, huh? Anyways, yeah, どういう means something like "how" or "what the..."

## 意味

いみ  
意味 / *imi* means "meaning."

X はどういう意味ですか。

So now let's add all of those up...

X はどういう意味ですか



X は // どういう // 意味 // です // か



X // how // meaning // is // ?



What does X mean?

Anytime someone says a word in Japanese that you don't know, just replace X with that word in order to ask them what it means. Here are 11 examples:

X	X はどういう意味ですか	x wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does X mean?
ねこ 猫	ねこ 猫 はどういう意味ですか	neko wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does neko mean?
はさみ	はさみ はどういう意味ですか	hasami wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does hasami mean?
しつぎょう 失業	しつぎょう 失業 はどういう意味ですか	shitsugyou wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does shitsugyou mean?
いた 痛い	いた 痛い はどういう意味ですか	itai wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does itai mean?
りょくちゃ 緑茶	りょくちゃ 緑茶 はどういう意味ですか	ryokucha wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does ryokucha mean?
ティッシュ	ティッシュ はどういう意味ですか	tisshu wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does tisshu mean?

ばか 馬鹿	ばか いみ 馬鹿はどういう意味ですか	baka wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does <i>baka</i> mean?
ともだち 友達	ともだち いみ 友達はどういう意味ですか	tomodachi wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does <i>tomodachi</i> mean?
ゆき 雪	ゆき いみ 雪はどういう意味ですか	yuki wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does <i>yuki</i> mean?
へん 変	へん いみ 変はどういう意味ですか	hen wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does <i>hen</i> mean?
わす 忘れる	わす いみ 忘れるはどういう意味ですか	wasureru wa dou iu imi desu ka	What does <i>wasureru</i> mean?

For the answers, see the Lesson #3, above, because these are all the same words.

Here's an example of what a conversation with your teacher might sound like...

<b>Teacher:</b>	Blah, blah, blah, 猫, blah, blah.	<i>blah, blah, blah, neko, blah, blah</i>	Blah, blah, blah, cat, blah, blah.
<b>You:</b>	ねこ 猫?	<i>neko?</i>	Cat?
<b>Teacher:</b>	ネ. コ. 猫。	<i>ne. ko. neko.</i>	Caaaaat. Cat.
<b>You:</b>	どういう意味ですか	<i>dou iu imi desu ka</i>	What does (cat) mean?
<b>Teacher:</b>			Cat.

By the way, you can also say: **X とはどういう意味ですか。** This version that includes **と** / *to* is actually more “correct,” grammatically speaking. But people leave it out all the time, so I wouldn’t worry about it too much.

### *Lesson #6 – Lesson Survival Phrase #3: “One more time, please.”*

Lessons #1-5 is probably enough for you to dive into your first lesson. Just in case, though, I’ll very briefly look at a few more phrases:

もう一度お願ひします

*mou ichido onegai shimasu*

**One more time, please.**

もう	一度	お願ひします
<i>mou</i>	<i>ichido</i>	<i>onegai shimasu</i>
already; again	one time	please

Say this whenever you didn’t catch what your teacher was saying, and you want to hear it again. If you say this to someone who’s not your teacher, good luck getting them to actually respond to you with the same exact thing that you asked. Japanese people have a tendency to change what they said to something way simpler after being asked this question.

### *Lesson #7 – Lesson Survival Phrase #4: “Please speak slower.”*

もう少しゆっくり話してください

*mou sukoshi yukkuri hanashite kudasai*

**Please speak a little more slowly.**

もう少し mou sukoshi a little more	ゆっくり yukkuri slowly	はな 話して hanashite speak	ください kudasai please
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Say this whenever someone is talking too fast (obviously).

Here's a [somewhat eccentric YouTube video](#) by a Japanese lecturer that talks about this.

Instead of ください, he uses <sup>いただ</sup>頂けますか / *itadakemasu ka*. This is a slightly different, more polite way to say please.

*Lesson #8 – Lesson Survival Phrase #5: "Okay, I understand."*

(はい) <sup>わ</sup>分かりました

(hai) *wakarimashita*

**Okay, I understand. // Okay, I got it.**

はい hai Yes	<sup>わ</sup> 分かりました wakarimashita (I) understood
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This is how we can reward our teachers after they do a good job explaining something.

*Lesson #9 – Lesson Survival Phrase #6: "I don't understand."*

分かりません

*wakarimasen*

**I don't understand.**

This is how we can punish our teachers when they suck at explaining things.

*Lesson #10 – Lesson Survival Phrase #7: "In English, please."*

えいご ねが  
英語でお願いします

*eigo de onegai shimasu*

**In English, please.**

えいご 英語 <i>eigo</i> English	で <i>de</i> a particle that means a lot of things, but in this case means "in"	ねが お願ひします <i>onegai shimasu</i> please
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*Lesson #11 – Check Out Common Japanese Phrases on Omniglot*

It might also help to read through this [list of useful Japanese phrases on Omniglot](#). You don't have to memorize this stuff, as all of it should already be in your pre-loaded flashcard deck. Just read it once or twice right before your lesson, then leave it open in your browser while you're talking with your teacher.

*Lesson #12 – Stop Reading this Book Already*

Go and start using this language. You're ready. Even if you don't feel ready.

If you've read this much of the guide, you know more about how to learn Japanese than 99% of the world's population. But knowing how to do something is only part of this process. I know how to get in shape—I diet and exercise. But that won't make me get in shape. Going to the gym will get me in shape.

So go to your Japanese gym. Start speaking. Start doing those flashcards. Start owning on this language.

# HACKING JAPANESE

## SUPERCOURSE:

### COMPLETE!

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You did it! You're done, finished. Boom.

#### Thank You

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Even though I spent about 87 years writing this study guide, I still never would have finished if it weren't for the help of some truly awesome people. In particular, the original motivation for writing this guide was the readers over at [NihongoShark.com](http://NihongoShark.com). Every time I got an email from someone saying that they had learned the kanji, or that they could really see themselves improving, it meant so much to me. And because of that, I wanted to write more content, to give people better advice.

I never would have done it without all of you.

#### **Thank you so much.**

If you're ever in [\[place I'm living now\]](#), I'd love to meet up for a coffee, or a beer, and we can talk about our drive to study this intricate, fascinating language. Just [send me an email](#).

The world is full of awesome people. Sadly, I doubt I'll get to meet even 1% of them. And yet, I'm overly satisfied with the volume of awesome humans that have graced my life thus far.

## You are not alone in this

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If you ever find yourself at a low point in your studies, especially if you're considering giving up on them, then please feel free to [email me](#). Learning a language is a huge challenge, and there are a lot of ups and downs. It doesn't have to be a question about grammar or vocab (although that's okay, too). You can just write and tell me about any troubles you're having with your studies.

## Want to help me?

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If you feel that the advice in this guide resonated with you, or if you just want to integrate the exploration of the Japanese language into your life more, there are a number of ways that you can help me and the [NihongoShark.com](#) project. Any or all of the following would mean so much to me:

- ✧ Telling your friends and classmates about my site and e-book.
- ✧ Writing a guest post for [NihongoShark.com](#). There are quite a few strict guidelines for this, but guest posters are always welcome. I wish I could pay for this, but I don't really have that much money, haha. Anyways, [email me](#) if interested.
- ✧ Comment on the site's articles and posts. Just because it makes my day like every time!
- ✧ Help someone else learn Japanese.

Good luck in your studies!

Keep swimming,

Niko

# APPENDIX -

## CHECKLISTS,

## SCHEDULES & LINKS

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Here I will list all of the checklists, daily study plans, and assignments for each phase of this guide. Then at the end, I'll include a huge list of links that sums up some of the best resources that are included in this guide.

### Phase #1-4 Checklists & Study Flows

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#### *Phase #1 - Checklist (Week #1)*

**Purpose:** Prepare Your Ninja Tools for Accelerated Japanese Learning

**Time to Complete:** 1 Week

##### **Mindset Prep:**

- Cultivate a Growth Mindset (i.e., Have Faith in Your Success)
- Commit to Long-Term Study
- Mentally Prepare Yourself for Future Setbacks
- Pick Your Holy Habit Time
  - ❖ Identify the Cue, Routine, and Reward
- Conserve Willpower
- Identify Barriers to Consistent Studying and Systematically Eliminate Them
- Create an Accountability System (Optional)

##### **Vocab Prep:**

- Download or Bookmark an App or Program for Learning Hiragana and Katakana (Ninja Tool #1)
- Download Anki (Ninja Tool #2)
- Purchase *Remembering the Kanji* (Optional) (Ninja Tool #3)
- Bookmark Reviewing the Kanji (Ninja Tool #4)

### **Listening Prep**

- Sign Up for JapanesePod101 (or Other Audio Lessons) (Ninja Tool #5)

### **Reference Prep**

- Set Up Your Computer to Read Japanese Characters (Ninja Tool #6)
- Bookmark Awesome Online Dictionaries (Ninja Tool #7)
- Install Awesome Web Browser Plugins (Ninja Tool #8)
- Download Awesome Smartphone Apps (Ninja Tool #9)

### **Grammar Prep**

- Choose and Purchase (Optional) Your Preferred Series of Grammar Books (Ninja Tool #10)

### **Speaking Prep**

- Download the Caveman Conversation Course (Included) (Ninja Tool #11)
- Create an Account for Taking Online Japanese Lessons (Ninja Tool #12)
- Create an Account for Japanese Language Exchange (Optional) (Ninja Tool #13)
- High Five Yourself

## *Phase #2 – Checklist (Week #2 – Week #16)*

**Purpose:** Learn to Read and Pronounce Japanese Characters

**Time to Complete:** 15 Weeks (3.5 Months)

### **Ninja Brain Prep #1 – Learn Japanese Pronunciation**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 30 Minutes)*

- Read the [Pronouncing Japanese](#) section a few times.
- Keep that information in mind as you proceed to Brain Prep #2.

### **Ninja Brain Prep #2 – Learn Hiragana & Katakana**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 1 Week)*

- Get a free app or program for learning hiragana and katakana.
- Learn the reading and pronunciation of every single character.
- Learn to write the characters (recommended, but you don't really need to if you don't feel like it; personally, I *never* handwrite any Japanese).
- Keep using your chosen app or program every single day until you know all of the characters like the back of your hand.

### **Ninja Brain Prep #3 – Learn All 2,136 Joyo Kanji**

*(Estimated Time to Completion: 97 Days)*

- Download Anki.
- Download the Nihongoshark.com Kanji Deck.
- Set Anki's preferences.
- Start learning new kanji.
- Repeat new-kanji-learning process 2,131 times.
- Review kanji flashcards every day.

### *Phase #3 – Checklist (Week #17 – Week #52)*

**Purpose:** Build a Foundation of Grammar, Vocabulary, and Speaking Skills

**Time to Complete:** 35 Weeks (~8 Months)

#### **Daily Study Chain Prep**

- Go online and find a monthly or yearly calendar that you like the look of.
- Print it out.
- Buy or set aside two colored markers: Blue and Red; or Your Favorite Color and Your Most Hated Color; any two colors.
- Start marking (Blue) X's on days that you study all three chain items, (Red) X's the first time you miss one or more chain items, and No X's every time you go two or more days without studying all three chain items (Hint: This should never happen).

#### **Daily Chain Item #1 – Flashcards**

- Download the [Blank NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck](#).
- When you encounter new words in your studies, add them to your deck (either manually or using EPWing2Anki).
- Download [the Pre-Loaded NihongoShark.com Vocabulary Deck](#).

#### **Daily Chain Item #2 – Listening Practice**

- Remove barriers to listening practice.
- Put audio lessons onto your phone, mp3 player, PC, Xbox, CDs—Everywhere!

#### **Daily Chain Item #3 – Grammar and Speaking Practice**

- On Day #1 of Phase #3, schedule a lesson or language exchange meeting for Day #7 of Phase #3.
- On Day #1-7 of Phase #3, plow through the Caveman Conversation Course.
- On Day #7, take your first (online) Japanese lesson.
- Schedule your second (online) Japanese lesson.

## Daily Chain Process

There are 3 items in the Daily Study Chain.

- When you do all 3 items, you can put a Blue X on your study chain calendar.
- If you miss one or more items one day, you can only put a Red X on your calendar.
- If you miss one or more items two or more days in a row, you cannot put any X's.

### 4. Flashcards

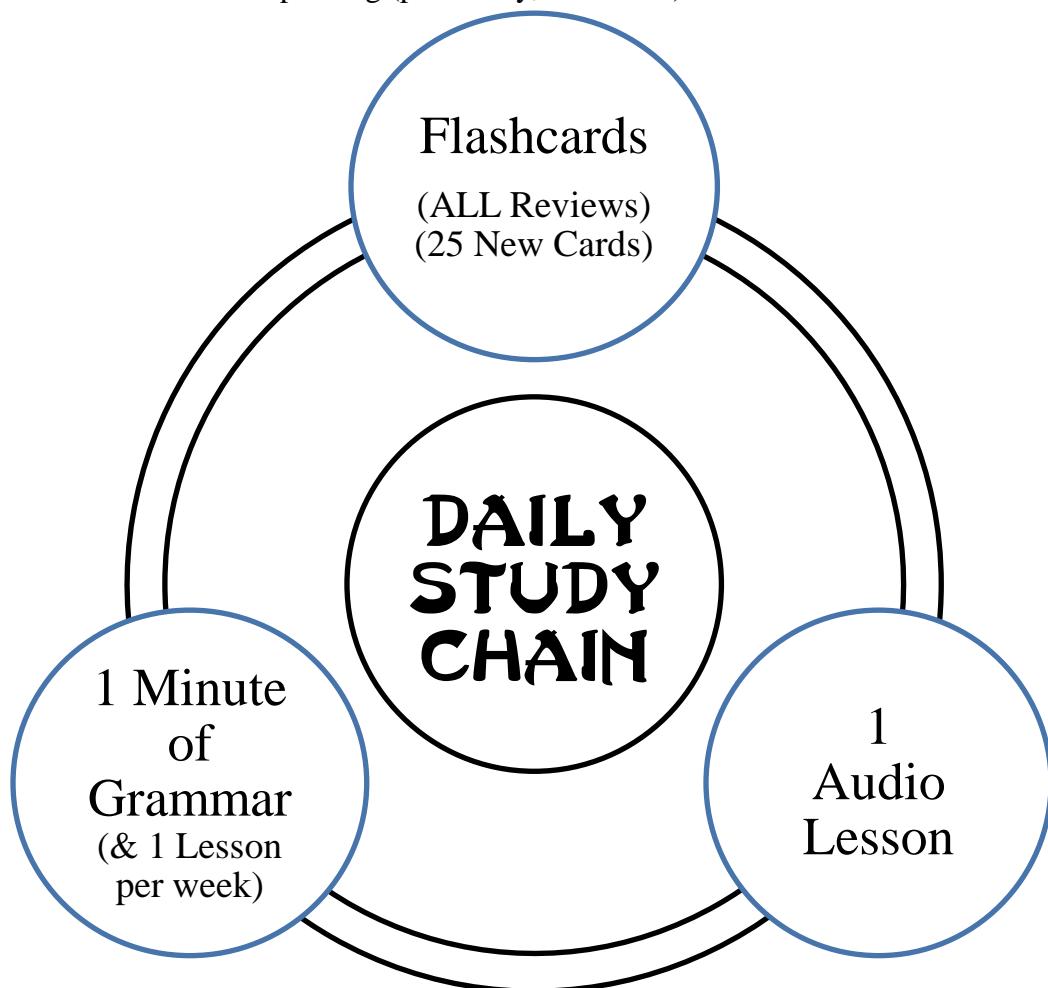
- ✧ Study ALL of your Review Cards every day.
- ✧ Study 25 New Cards every day.

### 5. Listening

- ✧ Listen to at least 1 audio lesson every day.

### 6. Grammar & Speaking

- ✧ Study grammar at least 1 minute per day.
- ✧ Practice speaking (preferably, in lessons) at least once a week.



## *Phase #4 – Checklist (Week #53 – ∞)*

**Purpose:** Clean up and expand upon skills and knowledge acquired in Phases #1-3.

Immerse yourself in Japanese. Start taking control of your study approach and goals.

**Time to Complete:** ∞

### **Completely Immerse Your Technology in Japanese**

- Set your PC's operating system to Japanese.
- Set your phone's language to Japanese.
- Japanify your web browser.
- Get more Japanese in your Facebook feed.
- Get more Japanese in your Twitter feed.
- Try to watch only Japanese videos on YouTube.
- Get more Japanese in your email inbox.

### **Completely Immerse Your Entertainment in Japanese**

- Listen to lots of Japanese music.
- Watch lots of Japanese TV shows.
- Read lots of Japanese manga and books.

### **Shift Your Study Focus**

- Continue and improve upon Year 1 studying.
- Give more priority to your motivator(s).
- Take the all-Japanese plunge.
- Go to Japan (optional).
- Set new goals (optional).

# SUPER JAPANESE

## LINKS LIST

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In this section, I have listed all of the standout links that appear in this book. Have fun! Remember to [stay productive!](#)

### Flashcard Decks

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- NihongoShark.com Decks
  - [Kanji Deck - NihongoShark.com: Kanji](#)
  - [Blank Deck - NihongoShark.com My Vocabulary Deck](#)
  - [Pre-Loaded Deck - NihongoShark.com: Japanese Core 2000 Step 01-10](#)
- Other Notable Decks
  - [Unoki's Shared Media Decks](#)

### Japanese Study Materials & Online Courses

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#### *Online Study Materials*

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- [Tae Kim's A Guide to Japanese Grammar](#)
- [JapanesePod101](#)
- [udemy](#)
- [FluentU](#)

#### *Japanese Lessons*

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- [italki](#)
- [Cafetalk](#)

#### *Language Exchange Sites*

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- [italki](#)
- [Lang-8.com](#)

- [MyLanguageExchange.com](http://MyLanguageExchange.com)

## Japanese Study Tactics, Communities, and Motivation

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### *Sites about Learning Japanese and Other Languages*

- [NihongoShark.com](http://NihongoShark.com) (I heard that scientific studies have shown that recommending this site to your friends can increase your Japanese proficiency by up to 21%!  
Numbers don't lie.)
- [reddit's "Learn Japanese" Thread](http://reddit.com/r/learnjapanese)
- [Reviewing the Kanji Forums](http://ReviewingTheKanji.com)
- [Tofugu](http://Tofugu.com)
- [JapaneseLevelUp.com](http://JapaneseLevelUp.com)
- [JapaneseRuleof7.com](http://JapaneseRuleof7.com)
- [AllJapaneseAlltheTime.com](http://AllJapaneseAlltheTime.com)
- [HackingChinese.com](http://HackingChinese.com) (Actually about Chinese, but still full of very useful advice.)
- [FluentIn3Months.com](http://FluentIn3Months.com) (About language-learning in general.)

### *YouTube Channels About the Japanese Language*

- [KemushiChan](http://KemushiChan.com)

## Study Tools & Resources

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### *Online Dictionaries and Sites for Looking Up the Usage of Words*

- [Jisho.org](http://Jisho.org)
- [Weblio](http://Weblio.jp)
- [Ameblo](http://Ameblo.jp)
- [imi wa?](http://ImiWa.com)

### *Awesome Tech Tools for Japanese*

- **Programs for Reading Japanese Characters**
  - Web Browser Plugins
    - ❖ Firefox
      - [Rikaisama](http://Rikaisama.com)

- [Rikaichan](#)
  - ✧ Chrome
  - [Rikaikun](#)
  - ✧ Safari
  - [Safarikai](#)
- OCR Programs
  - ✧ [KanjiTomo](#)
- **Smartphone Apps**
  - [imi wa?](#)
- **Flashcard Generation**
  - Anki Plugins
    - ✧ [AwesomeTTS](#)
    - ✧ [Replay buttons on card](#)
  - Desktop Programs
    - ✧ [EPWing2Anki](#)
    - ✧ [subs2srs](#)
    - ✧ [4K Video Downloader](#)

## Books

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### *Textbooks*

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- **Genki Series**
  1. [Genki I: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese](#)
    - A) [Genki I Workbook](#)
    - B) [Genki I Answer Key](#)
  2. [Genki II: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese](#)
    - A) [Genki II Workbook](#)
- **Minna no Nihongo Series**
  1. [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1 \(Beginner\) Second Edition – Complete Set](#)
    - ✧ Included in this special set are:
      - ① *Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1 Honsatsu*
      - ② *Translation & Grammatical Notes*
      - ③ *Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1 Second Edition Hyojun Mondai-shu*

(*Workbook*)

- ④ *Minna no Nihongo Sentence Pattern Workbook 1 - Second Edition*
- ⑤ *Minna no Nihongo Kanji Workbook 1 - Second Edition*

2. *Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 (Beginner) Second Edition*

- ① [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Honsatsu](#)
- ② [Translation & Grammatical Notes for Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Second Edition English \(available in 6 languages\)](#)
- ③ [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Second Edition Hyojun Mondai-shu \(Workbook\)](#)
- ④ [Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 2 Sentence Pattern Workbook - Second Edition](#)

### *Reference Books*

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- **A Dictionary of Grammar Series**

- 1. [A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar](#)
- 2. [A Dictionary of Intermediate Japanese Grammar](#)
- 3. [A Dictionary of Advanced Japanese Grammar](#)