

# **30 DAYS OF BECOMING A BETTER JAPANESE LEARNER**

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# In 30 Days, You'll Be The Greek God Of Learning Japanese

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This is a Tofugu ebook written by Koichi.

It was also edited by Erin (thank you, Erin!). Thanks to her, there are approximately 96% fewer occurrences of parenthesis (like this) and ellipses...

This ebook is dedicated to dual-horn Narwhals everywhere, because everyone in the office seems to like them a lot. Majestic.

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The goal of this book is to help people to learn how they can most effectively learn Japanese. It has the potential to cut years off your journey towards Japanese fluency, though don't forget it's still going to be hard work.

Feel free to take excerpts from this ebook and use them as you see fit (in your blog or whatevs).

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I think it's about time you got started now, don't you?

# Day 0

## *Introduction*

Okay, this doesn't count toward your 30 days, but I wanted to make sure I said "hello" real quick and then give you an explanation as to how to use this ebook.

The ebook itself is broken up into 30 days. Each day you should finish one chapter, and then by the end of 30 days, you'll be a lot better at learning Japanese. Sounds simple, right? Good.

Each day's method is something I've honed, crafted, and sculpted lusciously on the potter's wheel of Japanese learning so that I could present them to you in a way that will help you too. Some of the things you will go over are borrowed from other areas of study: psychology, education, and memory research to name a few. Others are ideas that I've stumbled upon by accident and through trial and error I've made them into Japanese learning methods I can't live without.

That being said, my way isn't isn't the only way to learn Japanese better. The goal of this ebook is to help you to test run many different learning strategies so that at the end of the month you can look back and figure out what worked and what didn't, specific to you. Even if you come away with five to ten big improvements to your Japanese learning, that will still represent a huge leap forward (and make several adorable puppies pop into existence as well).

Each day of this ebook is broken up into a few parts. There's:

- **Why:** You'll learn why you're going to do something and how it relates to your studies.
- **What:** You'll learn what you need to do to accomplish the goals presented.
- **Do:** You'll then be expected to *do* what was laid out in the chapter. Usually that means taking action on that day - other times it means preparing for a future action. More occasionally it means attempting to entirely change the way you think about learning. Don't worry, we'll mix it up.

If you read through every day and embrace the lessons presented in each, you'll come out the other side a much stronger Japanese learner. It's not just about what you learn, it's often *how* you learn it. So let's make that side of your studies macho. You wouldn't want it too end up looking like this guy, now would you?



# Day 1

## *Start A Tradition*

What a perfect way to start your very first day.

Here's the quick-and-dirty: There's only one main difference between people with a lot of willpower and people without a lot of willpower, and believe it or not it's not the amount of total willpower they have.

People, in general, actually all have the same amount of willpower. Also, the willpower that they have is a finite resource. You can think of it in the same way you think about harvesting trees. You can cut the trees down and the trees will eventually grow back, but if you cut these trees down faster than the trees can grow back, you'll run out of trees.

That's pretty obvious, but willpower is like that too. Wash the dishes? Cut down a tree. Learn new kanji? Cut down a tree. Study your vocab deck? Cut down another tree. Oh crap. You're out of trees. You'd better go collapse on the couch and watch some Arrested Development until your trees grow back.

Superheroes of productivity, however, do things differently so that they can cut down fewer trees than you or I. In order to do this, they make certain tasks into *traditions*. That is, the tasks they do are *just things they do*. They aren't chores. They aren't tasks. They're just automatic. They're habits, really.

Here's the difference:

**Version 1:** I have to wash the dishes.

**Version 2:** When I get home from work, I wash the dishes.

Version 2 is the tradition, version 1 is the chore. You'll accomplish the same task no matter how you think about it, but version 2 doesn't cut down a willpower tree. Version 1 does.

Since willpower is a finite resource (meaning the batteries only have so much juice before needing a recharge), being able to not use willpower becomes very important especially over time. If there's a task you do every day with your Japanese, creating a tradition for it will essentially allow you to use your finite willpower to do something else, increasing the amount you can do and get done. Over time this adds up, so there's no better time to start than now.

First, come up with a list of daily tasks that you have. They don't even have to be about learning Japanese, because no matter what, you'll be giving yourself an extra "tree" to use on Japanese. Pick something you don't particularly like, maybe washing dishes, or studying your kanji decks, or exercising your pet bald eagle, that you have to do every day.

Now figure out when you will do that task. Make that time completely solid. Make that time and task a *tradition*.

For example:

- **When I get home from work** I go through my kanji SRS and complete all my reviews.

- **When I wake up** the first thing I do is exercise my bald eagle.
- **When I lay down to go to sleep** I pick up my Japanese textbook and review all the things I learned that day.
- **When I finish dinner** I learn three new kanji before doing anything else.
- **When I use the bathroom** I recite, out loud, the 10 Japanese sentences I've pasted to the wall in front of me.

Notice how none of these sentences have to word “will” in them? As in, “When I finish dinner I will learn three new kanji.” The word “will” is tricky, because it gives you room to not do the task you’re saying that you’re going to do. When you say “I will” you’re putting that item off to the future. This task becomes “optional.” That is not a tradition. A tradition is something you just do no matter what, not something you will do.

So I want you to choose something to turn into a tradition for yourself. Then, I want you to start doing it. You won’t feel it at first, but if you tell yourself every day that this is simply something you do, you’ll begin to believe it and act upon those thoughts. Then suddenly out of nowhere, you’ll have yourself a new tradition. Over the course of a year, you’ll be able to cut down 365 extra metaphorical trees. What you use those extra trees on is of course up to you, but I hope you use them on learning Japanese, since that’s what this ebook is all about. Perhaps you could learn some extra kanji per day because of this?



Actually, though, you don't have to stop there. Once you've made one thing into a tradition, you can start on another thing immediately after. Just imagine what can happen if you turn four, five, or even ten things into tradition! You'll probably become one of the most productive people in the world - and guess what? It's not all that difficult to do once you know how.

# Day 2

## *Learn About The “Other” Kanji Radicals*

In regular Japanese classes or textbooks, you *might* learn about some of the really basic radicals. For example, you might learn that if you see the below radical in a kanji, it may or may not have something to do with water.



That doesn't tell you that much, does it? You may learn a few other radicals in class that will help you a tiny bit, but in the end it's not going to progress your Japanese forward as much as you want it to.

In my world, there are actually hundreds of radicals. Like, ~250 of them, give or take about 50 depending on who's list you use. Every kanji out there is made up of three (and in very rare cases four) or fewer radicals. So what does this mean?

If you're learning your kanji by strokes, memorizing each individual stroke, this new radicals strategy will *blow your mind*. The old way is absolutely terrible for the way memory actually works, it's slow, and will take you years, maybe decades. The radicals way is great for the way your memory works, is fast, and can get you through all the kanji in under a year (meaning *and* reading included).

Let's think about it this way. If you learn kanji by strokes, very simple kanji are just that: very simple. Three strokes? No problem. Once you get into the 10, 15, or 20 stroke kanji, though, you'll find yourself in big trouble. Memorizing fifteen individual strokes just for one kanji isn't easy, especially considering that most brains can only remember around seven new things at a time.

With the method I'm going to tell you about you'll never have to remember more than four (usually less) different things (radicals) to memorize the kanji. Plus, it will help you to learn the kanji's meaning, which is an added bonus.

The first thing you'll want to do is take a look at the radicals cheat sheet I'm providing in this book (it'll either be included in the zip file or at the end of this ebook in the appendix, depending on which version you're looking at). Other resources you may come across use different radicals from my list, and all of them will associate different readings to those radicals. This is okay, since the meanings of radicals are just there to help you to remember them. So, you can apply your own meanings to the radicals if you want, but just make sure you stay consistent and never change the meanings that you choose. Alternately, you can just use my list, which is probably a bit easier.

The best way for the concept of radicals to "click" is to just try it out. Let's take a look at a few different kanji of varying difficulty. You'll see how learning radicals will make kanji incredibly easy and simple to learn. You'll also learn how to make mnemonics for your kanji and learn their meanings as well.

Let's start with something simple:

切

The kanji's meaning is "cut." The radicals that make this kanji up are:

七 + 刀

You should look at your radicals cheat sheet to confirm this, but these two radicals mean "seven" and "sword." If you had learned this beforehand, you would see this kanji as merely two radicals - seven and sword - rather than four individual strokes.

You can even use the meanings of these two radicals to create a mnemonic to learn the meaning of the kanji itself. The kanji's meaning is "cut." With the two radicals, you could ask yourself: "What do *seven swords* do? The only thing they can do. They **cut**." There you have it, you see these two radicals in the kanji, remember the mnemonic associated with them, and then remember the meaning of the kanji. Of course, after a while you'll just automatically know the meaning of the kanji, but for those first few memory recalls, mnemonics help a lot (and they help you to recall the information even when the memory is a bit shaky).

That was a simple one. What happens when the kanji is more complicated?

𠄎

This kanji means “diagram.” It has seven strokes and is made up of three radicals

口 + ㄨ + 冫

The radicals are “mouth,” “treasure,” and “ice.” You should look at your radicals cheat sheet to confirm this (and to practice looking radicals up). With these radicals, we could say something like, “Inside his *mouth* there was a **diagram** showing where the *treasure* was: next to the *ice* caps.”

Do you see how they come together? Instead of learning seven separate strokes (that’s like the limit of your short term memory!) you only have to remember three radicals. Then, you use those radicals (which you already know) to learn and memorize the meaning of the kanji itself by making a story around them. The radicals in the kanji just have to trigger remembering the story, and once you remember the story, you remember the kanji’s meaning as well. It’s nice how that works.

Okay, now let’s look at an even more complicated kanji.

聞

Whoa! Eleven strokes. This kanji means “hear.” The radicals that make it up are:

門 + 耳

Despite how complicated this kanji is, it only has two radicals. That means to know this kanji (and be able to read it and write it, even), you only have to know just two things versus eleven the old

way. These two radicals are “gate” and “ear.” So, to learn and remember the meaning to this kanji, you could say something like, “What do the *gates* of my *ears* do? They **hear** things.”

That one was almost too easy.

We could take this a step further to learn the reading as well. To do this, you want to take the meaning of the kanji and use that to trigger another memory and mnemonic that will help you to recall the reading. The on’yomi reading for this kanji is “mon.” So, we could say something like: “What do I **hear**? Is that a moan?” If you imagine this situation actually taking place very vividly, and you actually *hear* the moan in your head, you’ll be very likely to remember this reading. That way, you have both the meaning and the reading in your head, and it took almost no traditional memorization at all!

Of course, this is not as simple as me doing everything for you. You *do* actually have to learn the radicals beforehand, and that takes some work. But, the time spent doing this pays big dividends for your future learning; you can go from taking ten years to learn all the kanji to less than a year.

For today’s chapter I only want you to start to learn the radicals. Take a look at the cheat sheet I’ve given you. There’s several tasks you can complete that will get you started, though learning a few every day or learning the radicals as you learn the kanji is the best way to go.

1. Take a look at the kanji you already know. Using the radicals cheat sheet, figure out what radicals make up these kanji. Start big and work your way down. It’ll take longer at first, but

eventually you'll start to recognize radicals more easily as you break up more kanji. If you're having trouble, try searching for the kanji on [Jisho.org](http://Jisho.org) and see what radicals it shows. The radicals on Jisho aren't exactly the same as my list, and there aren't as many radicals over there, but it'll give you a good idea what radicals you need to be looking for.

2. As you progress through *new* kanji moving forward, be sure to learn them via radicals, not strokes. If you learn five (or even one) new kanji every day, you'll have plenty of time to associate the radicals with the new kanji as you're learning them. You'll learn them simultaneously which means you'll automatically see the most common radicals first (which are also the most useful). Over time, you'll become very familiar with each. Perhaps this could even be the "tradition" that you're supposed to be working on from Day 1?
3. Create flashcards to review each radical. I like using an SRS (which we'll talk about in a later chapter) like Anki, though any kind of flashcard system will do. The more radicals you know, the more kanji you can know as well. It's like learning the letters of the alphabet, except instead of learning 26 of them there are 250+. If you know the radicals, you can "spell" different kanji. Just imagine what it'd be like to write words in English if you didn't know about "letters" and had to learn each word by strokes. "Z" would equal a squiggly line. "A" would be the pyramid with a window... It'd be chaos.

There are also a lot of resources and websites that help you to learn kanji in the fashion I've described. The most popular book is probably Heisig's Remembering The Kanji, though you'll only

learn about the meanings of kanji, which is helpful but not the entire picture. I can't recommend the other two books in the series, but the first one (linked) does a great job.

There's also <http://kanjidamage.com> and <http://textfugu.com> which both cover meaning, reading, and associated vocabulary (For transparency's sake, I created TextFugu, so of course I think it's incredibly awesome).

Lastly, there's a new website we're working on too, just for kanji. It's <http://wanikani.com> and covers meaning, reading, and associated vocabulary in a fantastic ordering. It teaches with radicals and mnemonics, and has a built in SRS system. As someone who bought this ebook, you actually get first crack at it when it goes into Alpha. Included in your download should be a link to get on the super-alpha list.



# Day 3

## *Don't Break The Streak*

I won't sugar coat it. Even streamlining the process as much as possible, as a student of Japanese, there's a high volume of stuff you've got to learn - radicals, kanji, vocab, and grammar to name a few. Progressing is going to require sustained effort over a long period of time. You can't learn a thousand vocab words in one day, but you *can* learn several thousand vocab words in a year, no problem-o. That is, as long as you don't procrastinate and keep consistent focus, even if it's only for a half hour per day.

That means you have to have a pretty mad study-streak going. You have to get to the point where your streak becomes an *obsession*. If you make the act of studying more about the streak and less about the actual task, you'll find that you get a lot more done overall because you're doing something every day. Progress may not be evident in the short term, but looking back after a year you'll be quite amazed.

The concept you'll be trying today is actually a technique that Jerry Seinfeld used back in the day to improve his comedy and it works with Japanese as well. Here's what he would do:

Every day he would write jokes so that he could get better, because he knew that small progress every day is worth a lot. In order to pressure himself into keeping up with writing, he got a big wall calendar and hung it somewhere prominent. Every day that he wrote jokes, he'd put a big "X" through that day.

After a few days of writing jokes, he'd have a streak with a bunch of those nice big X's all lined up in a row as visual proof. As the streak got longer, there'd be more and more pressure to keep it going. Soon it became less about the actual task of writing jokes and more about the obsession of keeping that streak going. The bigger it gets, the more you don't want it to break.

That's what we're going for with studying Japanese. Combine this with Day 1 (traditions) for a really nice motivational one-two punch.

To help you along, I've included a chart with blank boxes in them (at the end of the file 30-Days-Extras.pdf). The first one is numbered 1-70. The second one is blank so that you can add your own numbers when you get through the first sheet. Of course, you can also buy yourself a big wall calendar too, but that's up to you.

To begin, come up with a task you want to do every day. Goals that seem overwhelming are pretty good for this, because then you can break them up into tiny, daily pieces. I'd recommend using something like kanji or vocab, because that sort of things is very specific and you can set limits on what you do or don't do, defining what continues the streak and what doesn't. It's very important not to have wiggle room, otherwise you'll end up cheating.

For example, I could say that I wanted to learn one new kanji per day. To get an "X" for my streak, I'd have to break that kanji up into radicals, know those radicals, use that to learn the meaning of the kanji, learn the common reading(s) of the kanji, then learn two vocab words that use that kanji. If I'm able to recall all of those things without looking, I'd get a nice big red X. If I didn't

complete those that list, my streak would be broken and I'd have to add an X to my "sobbed uncontrollably today" streak instead. See how clearly I defined it though?

The hardest part with this is really the first ten days or so. You'll have to really push yourself, but once you get beyond that things start getting easier. Ten day streak? Yeah, I don't want to break that. Twenty day streak? Kind of a big deal. Fifty day streak? Breaking that would be absolutely terrible. The longer the streak, the better off you'll be, so don't break it!

# Day 4

## *Start A Journal In Japanese*

One of the things that people don't get enough practice with is writing. Not just reproducing Japanese text or transcribing spoken Japanese, but coming up with their own sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. That's the most important stuff!

I think the main reason why people don't write a lot isn't so much because it's hard to write. I think the reason people don't write more is because they don't know what mistakes they're making. This freezes a lot of people, which, of course, slows down your Japanese progress significantly.

There are ways around this, though. Today you will be writing something in Japanese and then get it corrected by a Japanese native speaker. Maybe you already know where I'm headed: the fantastic website <http://lang-8.com>.

Lang-8 is a site that allows you to write journal entries in the language that you're learning and get those journal entries corrected by native speakers of that language. It's a community affair, though, so you're also expected to correct other people's journal entries as you're able. Everyone helps each other out, and it's nice.

The actual setup is nice too. You can see what people corrected and, often, why they corrected it. After a while, you start to see

patterns emerge, which allows you to make changes and correction to your Japanese for the next journal entry.

Jumping in right away is fine, though there are some things I'd recommend doing before you get started.

First, make friends. It's a social site, and having more friends means having more people who are likely to correct your stuff. After you've set up an account and put in your information, find the "Language Match" section. There you will find a lot of people who a) are learning your native language and b) are native speakers of Japanese. Unlike most social networks, it's pretty easy to make friends on Lang-8. Just send something like:

"I am learning Japanese! Let's help each other! よろしくおねがいします!"

You'll find that you gain a lot of new friends quite quickly. Once you do, it's time to write something. If you're not at the level where you're able to write in Japanese (even something really simple), just read this chapter and move on, but come back when you're ready. If you can write simple sentences or more, write a journal entry. This will be really good for your Japanese even if you're a beginner.

You can write about whatever you want, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- What you did today.
- What you will do tomorrow.
- Something from the news.

- Your hobbies.
- Your family.
- Your history.
- What you think about bald eagles.
- Some opinion you have on something.

Like I said, you can write about whatever you want, since the important thing is the act of writing itself. Even more important is that you make a habit of it.

Needless to say, you won't make a huge improvement in one day, but if you write a journal entry every day (or two, or three... they don't have to be long), you'll get wayyyy better at Japanese. I've seen people on Lang-8 go from terrible to really good at the language they're learning in less than a year, and it's all thanks to the awesome community and the act of writing journal entries every day.

There are some things that you can do to help speed up the process, of course. After you get corrections on your journal entry, you should:

1. Figure out *why* each correction was made.
2. Ask “*why* did I get this wrong?” What didn't you know that caused you to get this wrong?
3. Figure out how to you'll apply this correction and then apply it to your next journal entry.

It'll be slow at first and feel like quite a pain, but after a while there will be fewer and fewer corrections. If you don't ask yourself these questions, you aren't actually addressing any of your problems. So even if you find the process a little embarrassing, follow through, otherwise you'll never improve.

It's important to take your time and be slower at first so that you can really speed up later on. Don't get stuck in the "mediocre forever" trap that grabs on to a lot of people.

As with everything else I've introduced thus far, do this every single day if you can. Apply the things you've learned recently, too. It's a great way to test your knowledge and figure out how everything works.

# Day 5

## *Try Language Shadowing*

Language shadowing is a little known technique that ought to get more credit. Basically, it involves you repeating audio and trying to emulate pronunciation, but it actually goes much deeper than that.

Language shadowing alone can actually teach you how to speak Japanese and is especially good for those who don't get much speaking practice in their day to day. As icing on the cake, it will also help you to get rid of any gaijin accent (i.e. you can use language shadowing to develop a native-sounding accent). It's hard work, but for those of you who need and want more speaking practice, I'd highly recommend this.

Way back when language shadowing was very difficult because it was hard to find lots of Japanese audio. Now though, it's easy peasy (lemon squeezy). There's so much audio, in fact, that it can be hard to know what to do with it all once you have it.

There's many ways to go about language shadowing though, but I'll go over the main ones.

Let's start simple: Take the corrected journal entry you wrote on Day 4 and have a look at the finished product. In theory, this should be pretty decent because it was corrected. Now, let's get this turned into audio. "How will I do that?" you ask. "Maybe you



should keep reading and stop asking so many questions,” I respond.

I want you to head on over to another website, <http://rhinospike.com>. This website lets you submit text in any language to get recorded by a native speaker. I bet you can guess where I’m heading with this. Submit your corrected Lang-8 entry to Rhinospike, and suddenly, you have an audio version of what you just wrote!

After you’ve gotten the audio for your text, you can start the language shadowing process, outlined below. It’s a simplified version, but enough to get you started:

1. Read the first sentence of your text the best you can. Read it over and over until you know how to read everything in that sentence. You won’t sound good at this point, but you should aim for reading smoothly.
2. Listen to the audio of that first sentence. Now listen to it again.
3. Try to emulate it. Listen to it again.
4. Try to emulate it again. When you’ve gotten to the point where you can say it just as fast as the audio, move on to the next sentence and repeat.
5. When you have 4-5 sentences, try to do all of them at once, without then with the audio. In theory, you’ve done all of them separately, but doing them together will probably be a little difficult at first.

6. When you're able to do the combination of sentences, repeat steps 1-5 with the next set of sentences until you're done. If you only have five sentences, that's okay. Just stop there.

The great benefits of language shadowing come slowly over time. You'll start to find that you sound more fluent. Your brain will get much more used to the sounds that make up Japanese, and then be able to process them more quickly, which is great for your listening. You'll also be exposed to a lot of Japanese, and the more Japanese you see and hear the more you'll pick up. Patterns, words, kanji, and so on will start to puzzle together into a bigger picture.

Of course, Rhinospike isn't the only audio resource for language shadowing. There are books, websites, and other things well suited for it.

One of my favorite ways to go about language shadowing is using Japanese drama shows (quite addicting!). You can usually find the Japanese *and* English subtitles for a lot of shows to read while you watch. Webpages [like this one](#) have a lot of these available to you. Just do a ctrl (or cmd) + f browser search to find what you're looking for. I'll have to leave you on your own when it comes to procuring the J-Drama itself, but I believe in you, just like how Sachiko believed in her son even though she lost her job and her husband cheated on her and ... oh god... I'm crying. Sorry, ignore me, keep reading...

Once you've chosen a drama to watch, and have found both the English and Japanese subtitles for that episode, you'll want to open the Japanese one up and take a look. Any plain text editor works well for this. Grab around ten lines from the subtitles file

and pull all the kanji you don't know out and learn them. Then, pull all the vocab out that you don't know and learn them. At this point, you should be able to read all of the lines. Do this until you're able to say them all smoothly. Right about here is when you can start your language shadowing.

J-Drama tends to be a lot more complicated but also a lot more rewarding. Dialogue is conversational, can cover a broad variety of topics, and of course, pretty interesting / addicting. Still though, I'd recommend drama only for those of you who are at a more intermediate or advanced level. For beginners, progress will be too slow to justify doing this.

Either way, I hope all of you eventually get to this point and try out language shadowing with dramas and movies sometime in the future, even if it's not right now!

For more information on language shadowing as well as the "official" way to go about it, check out this resource: <http://learnanylanguage.wikia.com/wiki/Shadowing>

# Day 6

## *Learn To Recall, Not Memorize*

Schools are trying to screw you over. They want you to memorize, memorize, memorize. Instead of rote memorizing, you ought to be recalling. Here's the difference:

**Memorizing** is when you try to shove something *into* your brain.

**Recalling** is when you try to take something *from* your brain.

When you try to memorize by inserting memories, things don't stick until you try to recall them. Have you ever found that after you take a test at school, you suddenly know more about the test subject than you did when you started the test? This is because you're forcing yourself to recall information, in the process creating greater and thicker neural pathways to that memory. By recalling it, you're telling your brain that it's important, so it'll then take the time to make the memory easier to retrieve for next time.

With this in mind, what I'm asking you to do today is totally change the way you think about memory and memorization. Whenever you need to remember something, like kanji, a vocab word, or anything else, I want you to try to recall it, not memorize it. Here's an example:

You're trying to learn a new kanji. Instead of writing it down over and over and over again to insert the knowledge into your

brain, try to pull it out instead. To do this, just look at the kanji for a moment (hopefully in terms of radicals, like from Day 2?) and remember it either via sight or via radical makeup (radicals are better). Then, just as you're about to forget the kanji attempt to recall it. Could you remember it? If so, then you've made a stronger memory for this kanji in your brain. You should try to recall it again a little bit later (right before you forget it again) to make the memory even stronger. If you didn't remember it then you didn't make your memory any stronger. Look at the kanji again and repeat, this time shortening the time between look and recall. If you're able to recall it this time, then congratulations, you're forming a stronger, more permanent memory.

Do you see the difference in strategy here? One just tries to shove information in in in in in in. The other puts it in once, then tries to pull it out again. If you're not telling your brain that it's important to be able to retrieve the memory, your brain won't care enough to remember it.

So, whenever you're learning or reviewing kanji, vocab, or anything else, try this form of remembering instead. In fact, try it now if you can. After you get the hang of it, you'll be able to learn various items a lot more quickly. This will help you not only in Japanese, but in life in general. Plus, you'll have a lot more time for other things because you won't be stuck in a room beating your head against your desk.

# Day 7

## *Envision Completion Before You Start*

You know how some days you feel particularly unmotivated to do something, like study Japanese? This is a day made just for you. Maybe you're feeling like you want to break your streak. Maybe you learned too many things too quickly because of Day 6. Maybe you just don't wanna write a journal entry. I hear you. We all get demotivated sometimes. This little trick will perk you right up and then rewire your brain into *enjoying* all the things you don't normally like.

Essentially, it all comes down to doing drugs. Luckily for you, all the drugs you need are already in your head.

When you do something you like, your brain releases all sorts of nice chemicals to reward you causing you to want to do it more. This is how people accidentally become hoarders, murderers, and lovers of learning Japanese. Don't worry too much about the first two, though kanji does have the "special" ability to bring out the psychopath in all of us.

We can actually take advantage of these brain chemicals though. You can use them to trick yourself into enjoying the things that are normally *unenjoyable*.

Let's give it a try.

Today, I want you to pick a task that has to do with learning Japanese that you don't truly enjoy. Maybe it's learning kanji, maybe it's writing a journal entry, maybe it's reviewing your vocab? It's all up to you.

Once you've figured it out, I want you to think about completing that task. How do you feel? Pretty proud, right? Humans are wired to feel rewarded when they complete something. It's good for survival, or at least it was at one time. School beats this feeling of accomplishment out of us, though, since we learn to be proud of grades, not completing and creating. If you're having trouble because of this, just take a deep breath and remember that you're doing this for yourself, not anyone else. Then, try imagine completion of your task once again.

Eventually, you'll actually rewire your brain into thinking that you enjoy these tasks. Because you're releasing happy chemicals into your brain at the start of your task, your brain will start to look forward to doing these things because of the positive associations. Pick a task you don't really care for and give this a try today to see how envisioning completion works for you. If nothing, it's a great motivational trick to get you started on something you don't want to do, which is often the difference between someone who studies a lot or doesn't study at all.

# Day 8

## *Use An SRS*

Do you use an SRS? If not, you're missing out on one of the best learning tools of the century. If you do, are you sure you're using it to its full potential? Whether you are or are not currently using an SRS in your study, I'm confident that you'll find this chapter helpful.

SRS stands for “spaced repetition system” or “spaced repetition software.” The concept behind and SRS actually stems from the things you learned on Day 6. When you use an SRS, it asks you a question in the way you would quiz yourself using a set of a flashcards. Then, depending on your answer, it will either show the flashcard again sooner or later. if you answer it correctly, for example, you might not see the card again for eight hours. Answer correctly again eight hours later and it might not show up for several days. If you keep answer it correctly, it'll get spaced farther and farther away until it doesn't get shown at all. If you get cards wrong, on the other hand, it will show you them more frequently.

Remember how, on Day 6, you attempted to recall something right before you forgot it to create the best memory in your head? An SRS is programmed to attempt to do this for you. If you get something right, it assumes you've formed a better memory because of your recall so it gives you more time to *almost* forget it. If you get it wrong a lot, it'll give you only a little bit of time to forget. Either way, it takes a lot of the guess work out of figuring out when you should try to recall a memory for optimum result.



There are many SRS applications out there, but for learning Japanese, the most popular one has to be Anki SRS. It's a bit complicated for people who aren't comfortable on the computer, but once you learn all the ins and outs it's definitely the most flexible system out there. You can also download flashcard decks that people have created for free, which means you can start learning more quickly, rather than deal with all the time it takes to build your own decks.

There are other SRS systems out there as well. There's <http://memrise.com> and <http://iknow.co.jp> for vocabulary practice and then there's <http://readthekANJI.com> and <http://wanikani.com> for learning kanji. There are plenty of others as well, though these are the ones I'd most recommend for Japanese learning.

There are however several things you can and should do no matter which SRS program you end up using. So, whether you're a seasoned SRS vet or a SRS newbie, this list should help you out.

- 1. Study Every Day.** If you don't, your SRS will be much less effective. Because every item has a time associated with it (i.e. when to show it to you next) it's important to study that card as close as possible to the scheduled time. That means if you miss a day, you could be messing up the "space" part of the spaced repetition system.
- 2. Study Multiple Times A Day.** This is way better than once a day. If you can swing it, study twice a day... or three times! This just makes it more likely that you'll study things when you're supposed to study them.

**3. Try Recognition First.** When using an SRS, you can often tell it what kind of answer to show. In other words, you can tell it to show you Japanese and have an English answer or tell it to show you English and have a Japanese answer. With items you don't know, start by having the program show you Japanese first. When done this way, you are *recognizing* the word. This is a lot easier, because you just have to recall something that's already in your mind (the English meaning) and not something that's not (the Japanese reading). After you've mastered Japanese-to-English, add in English-to-Japanese as well. The time spent with Japanese-to-English will help prime your brain to be able to recall the previously abstract Japanese words, making things go a lot smoother for you over all.

**4. Don't Bother With Multiple Choice.** Some SRSs use multiple choice answers. This is BS. Why? Because all you have to do is narrow down the answer and choose the one that you think is right. You don't actually *have* to recall anything at all, and if you remember from Day 6, *recalling* is important for memory creation. Multiple choice is a cheat, and you shouldn't have anything to do with it. If you don't know the answer on your own now, you certainly won't know it later. Don't take the easy way out today or you'll end up regretting it when you wash up on the shores of Japan unable to recall any words because you don't get to choose the right one from a list.

**5. Pick A Good Deck For You.** Finding a truly useful deck can be difficult, but it's well worth the time. Each SRS has their own set of decks (or just one big deck, especially in the

case of the kanji-specific ones). In general, the more popular decks are going to be the better ones overall, but take your time in picking something good for you. What are you weak at? What do you want to learn? What would be most effective for you? I'd recommend only picking one deck to start and focus on then add more as you get comfortable. It's easier to keep things simple, and you'll be more likely to stick with it. We've even made some Anki decks that we sell on the Tofugu Store. They were made to teach you the most important vocab words possible first, so that way you're recognizing Japanese more quickly (because these words show up more often than other words). I really like these decks, but I'm also pretty bias.

**6. Did I Mention “Use It Every Day”?** Seriously. You really gotta use your SRS every day for it to be effective. Maybe something you could do along with Day 1 or Day 3?

If you're not using an SRS already, you're really missing out. If you are, the only thing I can suggest is for you to use it more and apply what you've learned so far so you can use it more effectively. An SRS is one of your strongest weapons against the hordes of Japanese language vocab, kanji, and other nasties all trying to get you, so abuse this advantage as much as you can.

# Day 9

## *Think In Sentences*

Sentences are kind of a big deal. Most people really like to focus on the individual vocab or kanji. Although both are necessary parts of Japanese study, it's important not to forget about sentences as well.

What do sentences contain? That's right; they contain kanji *and* vocab. But there's one more thing as well: grammar. Limit your study to vocab and kanji and you're only getting part of the picture. Even studying grammar separately isn't good enough if you don't see it in use. When you study sentences you get the whole shebang. Kanji, vocab, grammar, and context. That being said, studying sentences is also more difficult and time consuming, which is why a lot of people don't focus on them as much.

The best way to study sentences is to think of them as individual items like you might in an SRS (Day 8, anyone?). Basically, you just put the Japanese version of the sentence on one side, then have the English side on the other. As Ross Perot might say, "It's just that simple."

Today though, I want you to think only in sentences. I want you to study sentences and I want you to study as many of them as you can. Here's how it'll work.

1. Find the sentences you want to study. I'll give you pointers on how to do this later in the chapter.
2. Break the sentences up into words. Identify which words you know and which you don't.
3. Break these words up into kanji. Identify which kanji you know and which you don't.
4. Do a quick reality check. How many words are there? How many kanji are there? Think about how long it would normally take you to learn each of these individually. Add these numbers up and realize that it's okay to take longer to learn a sentence. Sentences are more complicated yes, but despite this, you're probably learning more for your time than if you separated things out even if it doesn't seem like it at first.
5. Learn each individual piece (vocab words, kanji, etc). Now, put it all back together. What does this sentence mean? If you can't figure out exactly how the grammar works, try your best but don't stress out about it. There are a lot of resources out there that you can use which will give you the translations for the sentences too; you can take advantage of this. Grammar will come through experience or external study.
6. With your knowledge of the kanji and vocab of the sentence, learn how to read the sentence *out loud*. Say it out loud until you can say it at normal speaking speed.
7. Put this sentence into your SRS (if it's not already in there).

## 8. Repeat steps 1-7.

All these steps may seem overwhelming, but depending on the set of sentences that you use, a lot of the pain can be removed.

My favorite group of sentences to study is actually a shared (free) deck on Anki. Someone took all the sentences from a really good set of grammar books (Makino & Tsutsui's Dictionary of Basic/Intermediate/Advanced Japanese Grammar) and put them into an Anki deck. Even better, they ordered them so that you see the "Basic" volume of the book first, the "Intermediate" one second, and the "Advanced" one third. That way you start out with the things that are easier to handle and progress up to the hard sentences at a good pace. The deck itself is called "8547 Japanese Sentences." If you search for "Japanese Sentences" in Anki's shared decks you'll find it.

The thing about sentences, though, is that you won't start feeling good at it for a long time. After learning the first 2,000 you might feel a little overwhelmed. After learning 4,000 you might start to think "okay, I'm actually learning stuff." Then at 6,000 you'll feel good. Finally, around 8,000 you should feel like you're pretty proficient at Japanese. By the time you hit 10,000+ sentences learned, there's a chance you'll be start to get fluent. It's a lot, and it's overwhelming, but think of it this way:

When you get good at studying sentences, you can probably get through 50-100 sentences a day in Anki. So, that means in 100 days (less than a third of a year) it's possible to learn all 10,000 sentences. If you go three times as slow, you're still getting through all of them in less than a year. I'm in it for the long term

and I hope you are too. 10,000 sentences isn't as many as it seems! You just have to see it in perspective.

By studying such a large number of sentences each day, you're doing a few things. First, you're giving yourself a wide base of knowledge to build variations off of as needed. One of the exercises I like doing is to come up with around five different versions of each individual sentence that pops up in Anki. Let's keep the example simple so people of all levels can benefit. Say the following sentence pops up:

私は犬が好きです。

I would change the sentence to five different variations, saying each one out loud before moving on to the next card:

ボビーさんは犬が好きです。

私は猫が好きです。

私は犬が嫌いです。

私は犬がほしいです。

ステファンさんは犬と猫が嫌いです。

In these variations, I would use grammar and words that I learned from previous sentences and apply them to sentences I'm learning. That way I'm not getting stuck learning set phrases, I'm learning to be flexible. Improving flexibility is going to be important for your conversation skills and fluency. You have to come up with new sentences that you've never heard before on the fly, and this helps you to do that.

And of course, you'll learn a ton of vocab, kanji, and names as well. Names are surprisingly difficult to master in Japanese. Studying sentences helps to alleviate the shock of having to deal with names and their kanji later on, because you're just learning them as you go along. Since most resources barely touch names and their weird kanji readings, sentences will help you to learn this normally ignored topic.

So, today you should study in sentences. Remember, although there are a lot of sentences out there, you can learn them pretty quickly if you stick with it and practice consistently. It'll be slow going at first, but as you get better at it you'll be learning 50-100 sentences per day. Today, just get started with five sentences. Then, tomorrow do six. Slowly work your way up until you're a sentence learning machine.



# Day 10

## *Teach*

There's this saying: "Those who can't do, teach." I don't think that's necessarily true, unless you're a bad teacher. Really, it should be "Those that *can* teach also *can* do (better than anyone else)."

A lot of teachers talk about how they learn so much from their students. Beyond learning extreme amounts of patience with terribly-behaved children, I think they're also referring to the fact that they learn a lot from the act of teaching itself. You see, when you teach, you also learn the thing that you're teaching (and you learn it *way, way* better, too). Cool huh?

Why is this? Well, when you teach something to someone who has no knowledge on the subject, you're actually forced to break things down in a way that they will understand them. Even if you know something, it doesn't mean you understand it. For example, you know your native language, but how easy would it be to teach it? Do you understand *why* your grammar works the way it does? Do you understand *why* you'd use one word over another? English is a big mess, I certainly don't.

The moment you start teaching something you're forced to figure these things out. Either you research what you don't know or you break up the big complex concepts in your head down to smaller, more manageable pieces for the person you're explaining to. This process of simplifying and organizing your knowledge not only

makes you capable of sharing it, but it improves your comprehension of the subject, as well.

As you're learning something new, it's a great idea to teach it to someone else, too. I'm not saying you should apply for a job to become the head Japanese language teacher at Harvard, but try explaining what you're learning to a little sister or brother, or perhaps a polite friend. Worst case scenario, you teach a non-existent person. The main goal is to explain the things you're learning, and have to explain them in a way that anyone can understand. Don't let yourself say "because that's the way it is" or "just because." A younger sibling would never let you get away with that, so neither should you.

Alternatively, you could start a blog (<http://wordpress.com> is great) and use that to write about and teach the things you learned for the day. Just the thought of having an audience is enough for a lot of people, because you never know who might stumble across your blog and read your lessons. Heck, if you write something really useful and do a really good job at it, maybe your website will become popular. Plus, you'll be helping a lot of people out with your teaching, and that's great. Secretly, though, you'll be learning a ton from this, and this will make other things you learn a lot easier too.

So go! Teach something to someone right now. Maybe you already have a live, captive audience. Maybe you'll write something up on a blog or website. Even using the Note feature on Facebook would do the trick. Just make sure you take something from the Japanese language that you mostly know and teach it really, really well. Don't forget to simplify! It's harder than you'd think.

# Day 11

## *Learn To Use A Dictionary Or Three*

Dictionaries are great tools, but as with any language-learning material, it pays to know which ones to use and know how to use them. This is an ebook, so I'll stick to talking about web-based dictionaries. Everyone has their favorite, but I want to introduce to you a few Japanese dictionaries that I like, their strengths, and what they do. From there, you can try them out and choose what you like and don't like. The important thing is that you come away with that opinion. A good dictionary saves you a lot of time, gives you a ton of information, and is your bff for life. A bad dictionary is the opposite (and on top of that probably abducts children in its free time as well).

**<http://jisho.org>**

In terms of overall quality and usefulness, I'm a big fan of Jisho. For most general lookups, this is where I'll head.

You can use it to look up words (both Japanese to English and English to Japanese), look up kanji, look up kanji by radicals (which is huge for finding the meanings and readings of kanji you see and can't copy-paste), see example sentences, and more. It uses Jim Breen's dictionaries but makes that data a lot more user friendly. For my day-to-day, I like Jisho a lot for its ease of use.

<http://www.alc.co.jp/>

ALC is the dictionary that a lot of translators like to use. It's a Japanese site, and does good Japanese-to-English and English-to-Japanese.

The thing that this dictionary does better than all the rest, though, is provide great example sentences. The example sentences on Jisho (and most other dictionaries that use Breen's data) are kind of so-so I'd say. For quick, general things they're fine, but when you want great example sentences (or if you're specifically looking for example sentences), I much prefer ALC. When I need to know how a word is used rather than just the word's meaning, ALC is where I'll go. After reading a bunch of example sentences over here, I'll have a pretty good idea.

You can use the example sentences with the exercises in Day 9 as well. That's a pretty good deal.

<http://dic.yahoo.co.jp/>

Yahoo! Japan's dictionary also has good example sentences and even lets you search for synonyms of words (which is useful if you want to try and find a better word for something you're trying to say).

There are many other dictionaries out there as well, but these are my three favorites and (I think) the only ones you'll ever need.

Figure out which ones click well with you. Search for some words, look up some synonyms, and check out the example sentences. Once you find "the one" you'll be happy for a long, long time. A good dictionary, as I said, is a good friend.

Oh, and in tomorrow's chapter we're going to use a dictionary, so be sure to take a look at all three before then.

# Day 12

## *Use What You Enjoy*

For some reason, many people choose to study things that bore them. Japanese textbooks aren't particularly known for being fun and engaging, but they're often a big part of your studies.

But if textbooks aren't interesting, what is?

Things you're interested in, of course. Duh.

That's why today you're going to start integrating the things that interest you, on a personal level, into your regular Japanese studies. Depending on your level, there are varying amounts of strategies you can use. All of them are more interesting than reading about Beth (or whoever) and her home-stay in Japan, at least.

The first step to this is the figure out what you like. I mean, *really* like. Hopefully it's not "learning japanese" though, because things are going to be a bit awkward if it is.

What do you enjoy doing more than anything? What could you just do all day long and not ever get tired of it? That should be the thing you choose and if there's more than one, that's great too.

The activity or thing that you choose should ideally be something you are learning about as well. If you can learn about it, it's easier to use to study Japanese with, as I'll illustrate.

Once you've found what you're passionate about doing, we can look at ways to study with it, making things more interesting in the process.

Try some of the following suggestions/exercises today, doing what makes sense for your current Japanese level:

1. Using your brand spanking new knowledge of Japanese dictionaries from yesterday, take a list of words that have to do with your chosen subject and translate them into Japanese. Then, add them to your favorite SRS and start learning them! So, for example, if your passion was baseball, you'd add the words for "bat," "mitt," "baseball," "home run," "strikeout," and so on.
2. Grab example sentences that have to do with your words too. Break them up, understand them, and then put them into your SRS as well.
3. Whenever you learn some new Japanese grammar somewhere, use the vocab words you came up with in step one. Practice the grammar with your vocab items to make things more interesting.
4. If you're more advanced, look up your chosen subject in Japanese. Read about it and translate passages about it. Wikipedia is pretty great for this. Use a tool like Rikaichan to help you out if you need it, and be sure to add the words you don't know to your SRS app of choice! Then, after you've studied those words and grammar, come back to these passages and read them again. Did you get any better? Do you understand more now?

5. Write a journal entry on Lang-8 about your subject. What do you like about it? Why do you like it? Why should others like it? There's a lot to write about when you like something, I think.
6. Tell someone about your subject. Teach them about it *in Japanese*.

There's a lot you can do with the things you're already interested in. Mainly, I just wanted to make sure you didn't forget that you actually *can* use things you like to increase your motivation and enjoyment when studying.

You'll also be able to apply these techniques to other chapters in this ebook. You can add sentences to an SRS. You can learn more kanji. You can even do language shadowing. Don't forget that all these chapters work best when used together.

So what do you enjoy? Come up with a plan of what you'll do with that and execute it before the day is out.



# Day 13

## *Record Yourself Speaking Japanese*

I hope you've been practicing language shadowing from Day 5 for a while now. Kudos, if so. But, do you know how you sound? There's only one way to find out.

I think you'll be surprised when you hear yourself. I'm not saying you're going to sound bad, but you're going to sound different from what you expected. This is a good thing, though. If you don't know about something that you want to change then you can't actually change it, right? After all, knowing is half the battle.

The first thing you'll need for this is a microphone. Nowadays, microphones are everywhere - in your computer, in your tablet, in your phone - most likely, you can find a microphone *somewhere* in your possession. If you can't, I'd suggest investing in a USB microphone, almost any one will do. If you need to buy a microphone right now you can come back to this chapter later. If you don't then it's time to read on about software.

Personally, I use the application Audacity, which works on Windows, Linux and Mac. It's a simple program that should meet all of your needs, though you can use any audio program you're comfortable with.

Take a look at your language shadowing materials or whatever other materials you have on hand, as long as you have "correct"

audio to compare yourself to. Then, record yourself reading them out loud.

When you're done, play your recording back, and really listen. How did you do? Do you sound like the original recording? Do you sound natural? Do you speak smoothly? What would you want to change if anything? Take note and try again, making the needed adjustments to get you closer to your "ideal" recording.

A really neat thing about Audacity and some other audio programs is that you can compare your audio with the "correct" audio. Put them side by side and you can see the waveforms. Waveforms are a good way to see how accurate you are even if you can't hear the difference. You'll want to strive to have the same pattern as the audio you're comparing yourself to. If you do, then you'll know that you sound *perfect*.

One way to achieve this is a technique I really like that I call "Ten Steps." As the name implies, you record yourself ten times. Each time you record yourself, come up with one specific goal and that's it. With that goal in mind, improve on that one thing (let's say it's to not stumble on a particular word) until you've got it. Then, record yourself. Now, find a new problem and focus solely on that. By the end of ten recordings, you should have made a lot of improvements, building one correction on top of the next.

Repeat this process as much as you can. It's hard to hear what you sound like while talking live, as strange as that might sound, but it's so easy to hear yourself on a recording. There's a reason why people are surprised and embarrassed by how they sound on their voicemail messages, so don't let the initial shock stop you from doing this exercise and learning a lot from it.

I'd recommend recording yourself about once a week (though you should start today, if you can). It's not something you have to do every time you study, but it's always a good reality check to make sure you're on the right path and making improvements. The worst thing you can do is get lazy about your accent and speaking. Once you relax, it's hard to switch back to the correct thing later on. Recording yourself will make sure that you stay on track and continue to get better.

# Day 14

## *Study Someplace Different*

If you want to be good at Japanese in your room, then you should study Japanese in your room. If you want to be good at Japanese no matter where you are, you should study Japanese everywhere. Today, I want you to move someplace else when you do your Japanese studies. Change it up a bit. Make it fresh.

You don't want your brain to get used to any one place when you're learning something. Moving around helps your brain to be more flexible.

Have you ever taken a test at school and thought “dang, I knew this at home... why don't I know this here? I just knew it!”

Here's another thing. Have you ever walked out of a room, only to forget what it was you were going to do?

Both of these things are because your brain associates information with the location where you learned or thought about it. When you leave a room to enter another, for example, your brain considers it to be something known as an “event boundary.” This means that your brain thinks it's time to end one memory episode and start another [[Read More](#)].

Because your brain associates memories and thoughts with locations, if you want to know something really well, you should study it in multiple places. This will tell your brain that it's not

just information that's associated with a single location, it's information associated with all locations.

If you're unable to leave wherever it is that you're reading this, just go someplace else within that location. Maybe you're at home? Instead of studying at your desk, go study at the kitchen table. Something like that will work, though going farther away is better. Here's some alternative places to try studying your Japanese in:

- The library
- Your closet
- Someone else's office
- Another room
- A café, coffee shop, or tea shop
- A restaurant
- A pub / bar
- A friend's house
- A family member's house
- Your bathroom (toilets are great!)
- Under your table / desk
- Outside, in the great outdoors!

Wherever you try, just make sure it's different from the place you normally study, especially if you have a really location-based habit.

As you move forward into the future, try to mix it up. Work in one place for a week, then someplace else the next. This will also help to keep you more energized to study. It's easy to slack off if you study in the same place every day because you feel comfortable there. Studying in a public area will make you feel like people are watching, and therefore you have to study harder. Little things like this will go a long ways and keep you from getting complacent.

So, where will you be studying today?

# Day 15

## *Force Yourself To Slack Off*

It's Day 15 and you're halfway there. Time to slack off like you've never slacked off before. Welcome to the greatest day of them all.

For those of you who are already slackers, good news! You'll be pretty good at this chapter, though don't worry, I will test your mettle. For those of you terrible at slacking off... well, it sounds like you have some improving to do, so I'll help you to get better.

So why in the world would I *want* you to slack off? Here's the general idea:

When you're studying Japanese, do you ever get tempted to do something else? Things like playing video games, watching television, checking out Facebook, or eating a delicious sandwich? A lot of times, when we do "chores," your brain automatically comes up with things it would rather do. For some reason we're wired like that, and all the distracting internet-things that the 21st century introduced aren't helping either (Cat pictures? *YES PLEASE*).

You can attempt to ignore these temptations, which will only cause you to be distracted by them at a low-level on a consistent basis for several weeks, or you can destroy them all in one fell swoop by slacking off in the most epic way possible.

This sounds counter intuitive, but actually saves you a lot of time, so humor me here.

The first thing I want you to do is come up with a list of 2-3 things that you're always distracted by. Then, from the moment you finish reading this chapter, I want you to *only* do those things. If that's not an option today, save this chapter for a day that you have free, like a Saturday).

For this to work, you have to be pretty strict with yourself. I'll repeat: You must *only* do these things (with the exception of eating, using the bathroom, or attending to your pet bald eagle), because what we're trying to trick your brain into thinking that these slack-off actions are actually the chores you have to do. Now that you're telling yourself you *have* to play video games all day, suddenly your brain will go, "Wait, I want to study Japanese instead, I don't like all these *chores*."

If you're not *really* forcing yourself, though it's going to be actual slacking off, and your lazy-brain will approve. So, you have to be really intense about it, otherwise you've just wasted a day.

When the day is over, you should feel exhausted and ready to get back to studying. It's kind of like how when the kid on the old TV shows gets caught smoking. As punishment, his dad makes him smoke an entire pack all at once, until he feels really sick. Needless to say, little Joey never tries to smoke again. You're basically smoking a whole pack here in order to rev your engines up to study Japanese again.

Even though you'll lose a day by slacking off, you'll gain many very productive days in the process. A motivated person gets a lot more



done than a demotivated one, and this is just one way to become that type of person.

Give it a try - see how it goes... you slacker.

# Day 16

## *Do The 30-30*

You can bet that I'm doing this right now as I write this ebook. The 30-30 is a technique that will also be a great thing to use after coming back from your slack-off session in Day 15.

The idea behind it is this:

1. You study for 30 minutes.
2. You do something you enjoy for 30 minutes.
3. You study for 30 minutes.
4. You do something you enjoy for 30 minutes.

There are also other variations to this as well, depending on how motivated you're feeling. For example, you could do a 10-10 if you're having trouble getting going. Or, if you're feeling really good and motivated, you could do a 60-30. The important part is that you have a period of study and a period of doing something that you enjoy or that normally distracts you. This steals a bit from Day 15 when you had to slack off. By forcing yourself to break, you're tricking your mind into thinking it wants to go back to studying again.

When you *want* to do something, you're much more likely to do a better job at it. So even though you're spending half your time

slacking off, the theory is that you get just as much done as you normally would, if not more.

Ever since I started using this technique, my productivity and morale have shot up tremendously. Part of this is for the reasons stated above, but the other part is because I know I only have 30 minutes to get something done. That time limit makes me more efficient on the whole. I concentrate on the important things and get them done.

The 30-30 is absolutely perfect for language study, as well. Usually, you can get one “session” worth of tasks done in 30 minutes. You can learn a set of kanji, how a grammar point works, or a handful of vocab words.

All you need to get started is a timer and the task you want to get done. Set the timer to 30 minutes and hit start. You’ll immediately feel a bit of pressure from the timer to get going and get things done. When you’re being timed, you move faster and concentrate on the most important portions of your task.

Study until the timer goes off, and *immediately* stop what you’re doing. You’re not allowed to continue, even if you want to. I know this sucks, but it’s all part of the game we’re playing with your mind. Then, start the timer again and do all the things that normally distract you for 30 minutes. Once again, as soon as the timer is done, you should switch back to learning mode and study for another hard 30 minutes.

When all is said and done, maybe you’ll only study for 30-60 minutes. But, how much did you end up getting done? Take a look. Is it at least the same amount you normally get done? Is it

more? In theory, most people let their distractions get the better of them. So, if this blocked out distractions, then you should already be quite a bit ahead, even with the 50% slack off time (be honest with yourself, how much do you *really* get done normally?).

You can use the 30-30 schedule on other areas of your life too. I've found that it helps me to get other activities done more quickly so that I have more time for things like Japanese study (or sleep, in some cases). Making the rest of your life more efficient is just as good as studying Japanese more efficiently. Doing both, though, is ideal.

Before you move on, here's some other combos to try, depending on your level of motivation before you start:

- God-Like Motivation: 90-10
- So Motivated: 60-15
- Motivated: 45-15
- Normal: 20-20, 30-30, 40-40
- Not Motivated: 10-10
- So Not motivated: 5-5
- Dying: 1-1 (seriously, this actually works when you're feeling like doing nothing at all. What excuse do you have *not* to do 1 minute of study?)

As you use the 30-30 more you'll get a better feel of when you should adjust it. For most things, the 30-30 is great, but when you hit the zone and absolutely don't want to stop, you can adjust accordingly. All the power in this method lies in forcing yourself to take breaks, though, so don't skip that altogether. If you don't do the breaks, you're telling the reptile portion of your brain that it has control, even if it is technically doing the right thing.

# Day 17

## *Learn Japanese Onomatopoeia*

Japanese is a strange language. There are a lot of factors that affect how fluent you are and sound. One of those things is onomatopoeia, or words that represent sounds. In Japanese, these words are used *all the time*. Way more than in English, at least. Knowing these words will make you better at Japanese and can be the difference between sounding like a native speaker or not.

Today you should look at this list and learn some onomatopoeia. I'll get you started by providing you with some really common and useful ones. I'll also be giving you links to various resources that you can use to continue your onomatopoeia studies going forward.

Let's look at a list, first:

Japanese	English
ごろごろ	Purr Purr
にゃーにゃー	Meow Meow
わんわん	Woof Woof
きんこん	Ding Dong
けるける	Ribbit Ribbit
ドキドキ	Heartbeat (Nervousness)
わくわく	Sound Of Feeling Excited
べたべた	Feeling Of Stickiness

Japanese	English
ふわふわ	Feeling of Fluffiness
がしゃん	Crash!
ばん	Bang!
ぺろぺろ	Licking Sound
ぽかん	Sudden Impact
ぽこぽこ	Boiling
ちゅんちゅん	Chirp Chirp
ええと	Um, Uh
がちゃ／かちゃ	Click Of A Latch / Door
ぎりぎり	No Time To Spare
いちゃいちゃ	Public Affection (ewwww)
じゃぼん	Big Splash
もくもく／ぱくぱく	Eating, Munching
ざーざー	White Noise, Wind

You can add する at the end of most of these to make them verbs.

It's also important to note that this is just a tiny sampling of all the onomatopoeia words found/used in Japanese speech. A list of 300+ words to look at in one day; that wouldn't be very productive. Instead, focus on this list for now, put them in your preferred SRS, and make some progress reviewing them there. Then, when you're finished, you can start to take a look at some of the longer lists out there. Maybe you could learn one onomatopoeia a day for a year to finish all the others?

Other lists out there are:

ALC'S Onomatopoeia List: [http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/s\\_kaydic?ctg\\_in=4&char\\_in=a](http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/s_kaydic?ctg_in=4&char_in=a)

How Japanese Laugh: <http://www.fuzita.org/jpculture/howmanyi/jplaugh.html>

Baka-Tsuki Forums: <http://www.baka-tsuki.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=2485>

THDuggie's List: [http://www.morbidcornflakes.ch/thduggies\\_blog/203/](http://www.morbidcornflakes.ch/thduggies_blog/203/)

Everything2: <http://everything2.com/title/Japanese+onomatopoeia>

These resources will also teach you about how onomatopoeia work, in general. I'd recommend the last link in particular, since it goes over the verb forms and categorizes them especially well.

I hope you learned a lot about Japanese onomatopoeia today. I know they seem like a weird, useless facet of Japanese, but they are an important part to gaining Japanese fluency, and it makes more sense to get started on them earlier rather than later.



# Day 18

## *Eliminate Your Weakest Link*

What's the difference between people who are pros at something and people who are just okay at it? The main difference is that the pros focus on their weaknesses.

Nobody likes to be reminded that they're bad at something. In Japanese, it's likely that you avoid the subjects and topics that give you trouble for this very reason.

Today I'm asking you to look at your weaknesses in a different light. When you struggle with something, you should be happy! It means you know enough about Japanese and learning Japanese to recognize where you need to improve. Remember when you first started Japanese and everything felt simple and easy? That's only because you were too naive to know if you were bad at something or not, so you assumed everything was good. Now that you've advanced you actually have the ability to know when you're bad at something. You ought to be taking advantage of that!

Everybody else out there is just sitting on their laurels, working on just the things they're good at. But you know what? If you want to truly move forward with your Japanese, you have to work on the things that you find the hardest even more than those that seem like cinch.

So, reality check time. What are you bad at? What are you *terrible* at?

For me, the answer to this question tends to change. I get really upset when I'm bad at something, so I focus like an insane person to eliminate it. Then, after a while, I realize that because I got rid of the last thing, I now have another thing I'm bad at, though it's not as bad as the first thing was. Then the process repeats itself until everything starts getting better and you have to raise your own standards for what's "bad" and what's "good."

This mindset forces you to improve more quickly and in a more balanced way. The top figure skaters in the world are all really good at figure skating. This is a given. The gold medal winners, however, are the ones who focused on the really difficult triple delux luxor deus ex spin flip (can you tell I don't know anything about figure skating?). This made up technique is the thing that *everyone* is bad at. Guess who wins, though? The person who spent the most time making this weak-point better than everyone else's. Everyone's good at the easy stuff, but nobody's good at the bad stuff. That's just laziness right there.

Think of it this way: if you're bad at kanji, you can't learn vocabulary in the way it's meant to be learned. If you don't know vocabulary, you can't communicate what you're thinking in Japanese. Also, the ability to practice reading is held back by a weak kanji foundation. The more kanji you know, the more Japanese you can read. The more Japanese you read, the better your Japanese can get. Do you see how just one weak spot can hold *everything* back?

Here are some questions to consider:

- What are you the worst at? I think a lot of people will choose "vocabulary" for this, but choose something specific to you.

- Why is it your weak spot? What does this weakness hold back? List off how it affects the rest of your studies and progress.
- What do you need to do to eliminate this weak spot? If you spent 15 minutes a day doing X, would it fix this problem?

When you find your weak spot and figure out what you need to do to fix it, write out your plan and get started. Be sure to pace yourself. If you rush your progress and try to get it all done in one day, you'll likely fail. Can you imagine doing something you *hate* for 12 hours in a row? I certainly can't. It'll be more effective if you spend 15-30 minutes a day for a month rather than spending 30 hours on a weekend.

Eventually, there will be a time where you notice that the thing you are working on isn't your weakest link anymore. You'll start to enjoy working on it as you see improvement and then \*poof\* you won't be bad at it anymore. Once this happens you'll need to let go and move on to something that you're worse at. The good thing, though, is if you repeat enough times, you won't have anything you're terrible at anymore, and won't that be neat-o, friend-o?

So, when you can, focus on your weak points. They're messing you up *everywhere*, and you can't let them do that. Plus, by focusing on your weaknesses you'll get ahead of everyone else too. You can bet that 99% of people don't work on their weaknesses as hard as you do, which means you will soon be in the top 1% of Japanese learners. How great would that be. Maybe if you think about completion before even starting, it'll give you the kick start you need.

# Day 19

## *Alternate Between Types Of Study*

On Day 6, you learned how recall is better than straight up memorization. Let's take that a step further today and supercharge your memory with "interleaving."

Most likely, you study one type of item (kanji, vocab, grammar, sentence, etc) all at once, then move on to another type of item once finished. In terms of good memory practice, this wins the award for being the most inefficient.

What you want to do instead is study several completely different things at the same time (though these things should be of the same subject, in this case Japanese), alternating them every couple of minutes. This works particularly well with items that you can study within 2-5 minutes, like kanji, vocabulary, and sentences. Entire chapters of textbooks on the other hand aren't going to work as well for this exercise unless you're clever enough to break them up into manageable pieces. Mainly, this is a technique for memory, so use it on things you need to be able to memorize.

Here's how you might go about doing it:

1. Study a single kanji. Let's say it's the kanji for "eagle."
2. Study a single vocab word. It has nothing to do with eagles. Let's say the vocab word is "monkey."

3. Try to recall the kanji. Could you recall it? Good, you've strengthened that memory.
4. Study a different kanji. Let's say it's the kanji for "fugu."
5. Try to recall the vocab word "monkey." Could you recall it? No. Shoot. Darn. Crap. Try to remember it again.
6. Study a sentence. Learn to say the sentence out loud.
7. Try to recall the vocab word for "monkey." Good, you remembered it this time. Try to recall the kanji "eagle." Nice.
8. Say the sentence from Step 6 out loud without looking at it. Could you recall it from memory? Great.
9. Try to recall the kanji for "Fugu."
10. Now learn a ...

And so on and so forth. It might feel a little chaotic, but this is truly the best way to memorize things. UCLA Psychology Professor Robert Bjork says that by switching between several subjects, you're adding a sense of difficulty that helps with memory. Your brain works harder and therefore forms better memories around the items you're learning. According to Bjork, "if information is studied so that it can be interpreted in relation to other things in memory, learning is much more powerful." From experience with this, I totally agree. That being said, you shouldn't interleave things that are *completely* different. As in, you don't want to study soccer and Japanese language at the same time like this. That won't help you. Study multiple Japanese-related things together instead.

Now, don't get this confused with multi-tasking. Multi-tasking is when you have your IM open, music on, and cat videos playing while you're studying your Japanese. That's a terrible thing to do. With this, you're shifting from one single focus to another, with the emphasis on *single focus*.

While you're doing this, be sure to come up with a system that will allow you to keep track of what you studied before, that way you can practice recall as well. For me, I just jot down notes in a sort of timeline fashion that lets me look back and remember what I've done and need to recall. For you, it might be something different. Find a method that works well for you.

Before you jump right in, I'd recommend coming up with categorized lists of items you want to learn if you don't have some already. A little preparation goes a long way. If you put three lists in front of you, you can pull one item from the first list, study it, then pull another item from the next list, study it, and continue on like that until you're done. Just make sure you're alternating from one list to another and you're taking notes of what you've studied.

Once you get good at this, it feels a lot more natural. When it does, no small item will become difficult to memorize, allowing you to study more quickly or study a lot more. Both are pretty good.

# Day 20

## *Figure Out What To Do Next*

One big picture skill that a lot of people seem to be missing is simply the ability to “figure out what to do next” before taking action.

When you don’t know what actions you need to do next, your brain freezes. You see, your brain processes “meaning” before “detail.” So, even though you know you need to study your Japanese, your brain actually doesn’t understand *why* you need to study your Japanese.

Every time you try to study without answering the question “why am I studying this?” your brain will push back, and we want to avoid this at all costs. That’s why I’m always telling people *why, why, why* on my Japanese textbook TextFugu. If you don’t know why, your brain will revolt. If your brain is revolting, you won’t learn very much, and that’s especially bad for self-learners.

The best way to do this is to plan ahead and figure out what you’re going to do and why you’re going to do it. You need to be as detailed as possible, too. Coming up with ambiguous plans is almost as useless as coming up with no plans at all. Here’s an example:

You know you need to learn a certain set of sentences for your language shadowing practice. First, let’s see an example of how *not* to mentally prepare yourself for the next task:

*“I need to study these sentences.”*

Boo. This is terrible. See how ambiguous that was? First of all, you don't know why you're studying. Secondly, you don't even know how to begin.

Instead, you should spend a few minutes mapping a game plan out. Even though a few minutes of planning time may feel like a waste, it will speed your studies up for the long term.

Here's a better plan:

“I need to study my sentences because they will help me to understand grammar more effectively. Plus, when I finish studying them, I can use these sentences with my language shadowing studies which will allow me to practice Japanese speaking and listening.

In order to study these sentences, I have to break them down into items I know and don't know.

First, I'll need to identify and list all the vocabulary words.

Then, I'll pull any kanji I don't know out from the vocabulary. I'll break these kanji up into their individual radicals, then look up the meaning of the kanji on Jisho. Once I've done that, I can use the radicals to create a mnemonic to remember the meaning as well. Any new kanji will be added to my SRS.

When I've learned all the kanji I'll learn the vocab words that use the kanji. Since I know the kanji, the vocabulary should make a lot more sense and be easier to remember.



Once I've learned all the vocabulary, I will practice saying each sentence out loud until I feel comfortable with it. Then, I'll speed each reading up until I feel like it's close to a normal speaking speed.

Once I'm able to say each sentence, I'll translate them to the best of my ability, and then compare my translation to the correct one. If they are different, I will find out why they're different and what I did wrong.

When I have done this with every sentence, I will be able to use these with the audio I have, and then I'll start language shadowing."

After you're done with this, you'll probably want to come up with another similar plan for the language shadowing part as well.

All that took me about five minutes to write, but you can jot down a series of notes that mean the same thing quite a bit faster. The main thing is to get really specific with your plans. Always answer *why* you're doing something, even for tasks you do quite often; it'll help convince your resistant brain that something is a good idea. Also, break your plans up into small, actionable tasks. If your task isn't actionable, then it's not something you can actually do. That leaves room for a lot of ambiguity, and ambiguity is a breeding ground for inaction. Focus on "doing."

So today before you study, break your study session down into small tasks like this. Also, be sure to tell your brain why you're going to be doing something. If you do, I think you'll find yourself less prone to procrastination. Plus, you'll get things done more

quickly. It will help you to avoid a lot of frustration and pain, and make for a smoother study experience overall.

# Day 21

## *Practice Failure*

We've all been taught to avoid failure at all costs. The 'F' in school stands for "Failure." When you flunk a subject in school, you get punished by your parents. For some reason, getting six A's and one F is way worse than getting seven C's or B's. Why is that? Well, it's because our society hates a screwup.

But, you're studying Japanese for yourself, and not anybody else. There are no consequences for failure. Quite the opposite, actually.

Teachers probably never told you this, but you learn the most from failure. Every time you fail, you have the opportunity to learn what you did wrong, why you did it wrong, and how you can fix it. If you're always terrified of failing, you'll never take risks or try new things. That means you'll also never really progress, either.

Really successful people fail a lot. There's a great quote by arguably the most successful basketball player of all time that I think really captures this.

"I've failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed." - Michael Jordan

Think about it this way. If all you do is succeed... then what are you learning? Not all that much. If you fail and fail again, you'll

eventually figure out the best ways to do things. You'll also be less afraid of failing so you'll be able to fail more spectacularly than anyone else, which will set you up for more amazing successes later on. Does this remind you of something?

Today I want you to fail, and I want you to fail a lot. Lang-8 is a great way to do this. Push your boundaries and try things you're not comfortable with. Use grammar you don't actually know; look something up, try it out, see how it goes. Who *cares* if you mess up? That's the point. The more comfortable you are with messing up, the more willing you'll be to try new things, which is an invaluable mindset to have as a language learner.

If you're having trouble with this concept, make it into a game. See how many times you can fail in an hour. What about an entire day? Now attempt to break your record.

The important thing is that you always know *why* you're failing. If you don't know this, then you're just failing blindly, not failing because you've pushed your own limits.

So, fail and fail again. Learn from those failures and then push yourself even deeper into the rabbit's hole. You'll find yourself learning about things you never expected learning about. You'll also become very comfortable with all the "normal stuff" that gave you trouble not too long again. Do you know the saying about going from the frying pan to the fire? Make sure you're in the fire as much as possible.

# Day 22

## *Practice Rejection*

Just when you thought you were done with failure it's time to look at a similar concept: rejection.

For a lot of people, rejection is worse than messing up, because it means that another *person* is actively judging them. \*Gasps\* all around.

Fear of rejection, though, is yet another mental block, holding you back from taking risks. It makes you freak out about how people perceive you, but you know what? It doesn't really matter what other people think.

Personally, I've never been good at initiating conversation. I've gotten better, but I'm still not as comfortable as I'd like to be. Despite being this type of person, I *love* it when people randomly talk to me. That other person has gotten over their fear of rejection. They know that it's actually very difficult to get rejected, despite what you may think in that worried head of yours. People don't say "no" as much as you expect they might.

Today's goal is to find yourself at least one native Japanese language partner to study with. Not all of them are going to be good language partners, and not all of them will follow through, so it's good to find a few. You can never have too much speaking practice, after all.

Look around the internet and try to find potential places where you can ask people to practice with you. Most people use Skype to do their language exchanges, so the Skype Forums are a good place to start. You'll have to do some searching around, but there are people looking to practice. You can even go over to Skype's Japanese forums if you're feeling adventurous.

Another good place to find language partners is Lang-8. Although you can and should post up journal entries asking for language partners, I also want you to message some people directly. We're working on your fear of rejection, after all. Find 10-20 people who have corrected your posts in the past. Message them, being sure to thank them for their corrections, then ask them if they'd be willing to be your language partner. The goal should be to get around five different "yes" answers so you have plenty of people to practice with when/if some of them start flaking.

Also, this should illustrate that it's not actually that hard to ask someone for something, making it easier to ask the next time. You'll certainly be rejected, or at least ignored, in this exercise, but I think you'll find that it isn't all that horrible an experience. The world won't end, you won't lose your home, and your bald eagle will still be healthy and majestic. So really, what is there to be afraid of?

I'm also a big fan of *trying* to get rejected as a sort of game, just like we did with failure. If you're interested in this concept, you should check out the official Rejection Therapy game. It's a real life game that makes you seek out rejection. By getting rejected, you gain more confidence in yourself and learn to push the

boundaries set up by society. Plus, you “win” the game. How cool is that?

For today, go out and seek the rejection of potential language partners. I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised by the response you get, and if you fail, just figure out why, fix it, and try some more.

# Day 23

## *Simplify Your Life, Your Mind*

Our lives are overly complicated. You know how your grandparents always said, “back in my day things were simpler”? It’s kind of true. We have more *stuff*, and that’s not limited to physical things. Our computers are packed with movies, music, applications, and icons, all of which are distracting as well.

Basically, no matter where you turn, there’s *things* there, ready to distract you. Very *unimportant* things, and they are keeping you from studying Japanese at 100%.

I’m not saying you should become a minimalist, with a table and chair in the middle of a barren room, but there is something magical about getting rid of the stuff you don’t need.

Here’s some ideas:

- Old T-Shirts
- Books you don’t need
- Toys
- DVDs
- Unperishable food you won’t eat



- Boxes of old stuff you couldn't bring yourself to give away (be strong!).

But this list isn't limited to physical items. Digital content is distracting, too.

- Remove the bookmarks bar in your browser. This will make it harder to access all of your most distracting sites, simplifying your options. You'll be more likely to browse the places you actually need to browse to.
- Clean your computer's desktop. Covered with icons, it's a lot like a messy room. Organize everything and put them where they belong. Once clean, you'll feel relieved.
- Uninstall applications you don't use anymore.

Although more extreme, consider reformatting your computer if you have the technical ability to do so. This will let you start from scratch, only reinstalling programs as you need them. This will show you what is truly useful.

Also, set your computer up for learning Japanese right away. For example, you could put the Anki icon front and center on your desktop, with nothing else around it. You could immediately install browser plugins like Rikaichan/Rikaikun. Also, make sure you add Japanese input support (Google's Japanese IME is great). If you're really hardcore, set your computer to Japanese-mode when you reinstall your operating system. Nothing says "I'm studying Japanese" like a computer where everything is in Japanese.

But the main message of today is: Simplify. Get rid of what distracts you. It'll allow you to focus in on only what is top-priority. Assuming top-priority is Japanese, you can reorganize around that as your pillar of strength. When you start from scratch, you get to decide who you are and what you do when you begin to rebuild.

So before you talk yourself out of it, go and box up the things you want to give away and don't over-think it. Start your reformat. Clean up. Make things pretty. You'll need the extra energy and breathing room for tomorrow.

# Day 24

## *Have A Great Language Partner Session*

On Day 22, you practiced rejection by asking people to be your language partner. Hopefully you have a couple of language partners by now and you're ready to get started.

Here's the problem, though. Most language partner sessions are kind of terrible, and usually go something like this.

Bobby: こんにちは

Takehiro: こんにちは

Both: (Uhhh, what do we talk about next?)

People don't come prepared for these sessions which makes for a bad experience on both sides of the table. To solve this problem, we're going to make sure that you prepare in a way that makes both people happy. This way you're more likely to have another session (and another) with the same people down the road. It's tiring trying to find new people all the time because your old partners ones constantly "disappear" on you.

There are three problems that seem to come up frequently with language partner conversations. They are:

1. Neither of you knows what to talk about because neither of you came prepared with anything (AWKWARD).

2. Only one of you is willing to talk because the other person is too shy or embarrassed.
3. *Both* of you are too shy, so you *both* don't say anything (also awkward).

Luckily, all you need to do to avoid either situation is preparation.

Today, schedule a language partner session with one of the people from Day 22. Once you've scheduled something, it's time to prepare, and help your partner prepare as well.

We'll break this up into pre-language-exchange and during-language-exchange.

Before you get to your language exchange session, you absolutely need to come up with topics. Recent news stories are good, but if it's your first time with this person, topics about yourself are okay, too. What do you like? Who are you? Would you take the red pill or the blue pill? Be creative. Feel free to draft out ideas for what you're going to say.

That's the easy part, though. After you come up with topic ideas, you should create word lists that have to do with that topic. In one column, have a list of English words and in the other, the Japanese translations. After you've completed this you should send it to your language partner to let them know that's what you want to talk about. The word list is especially helpful for them if they want to talk about the same thing in English. Plus, it gives both of you something to study before your language exchange session begins.

Other ways to prepare include coming with questions about the Japanese language. Maybe there's a word or phrase you don't understand and need some examples for it. As a native speaker, this will be easy for your partner, helping him or her to relax a bit and get the conversation moving.

Besides pre-exchange preparation, there are plenty of things you should do during the language exchange as well.

Using a timer is extremely effective at keeping the ball rolling. It discourages awkward pauses or lulls in the conversation. Also, it makes sure that both of you have an equal amount of time to practice. Your partner is more likely to stick around if they feel that they're improving in English because of your sessions too.

Also make sure you take notes, not only about what you've learned, but also what your partner is learning. The more you know about your partner's goals, the more you can help him or her. Eventually the feeling will become mutual, and you'll develop a great language-exchange relationship.

By learning about your partner, you're also coming up with future topics of conversation. If you learn that your partner likes cat videos, be sure to prepare something to talk about that has to do with cat videos for next time. If you talk about the things your language partner is interested in, they're sure to have a much better time. If you're really lucky, you'll find out that you both have the same interests, too. "Takehiro, you raise and breed bald eagles as well!?" What a match made in heaven.

Lastly, don't forget to smile. Even if you're not on video, smiling is audible when you speak. Humans can sense if someone's happy or

not, and smiling at the very least makes people seem happier. Give it a try. I think you'll be surprised at how well this works to put your language partner more at ease. Japanese people are notoriously shy, so anything you can do to make them feel relaxed is a good thing.

I think the main lesson to be learned is that you have to prepare not for yourself, but for your partner as well. Your effort should be put towards making the experience better for them, not you. If you do, then you both reap the rewards. If you're selfish, you're likely to lose a language partner.

In the end, it's all about the preparation if you want to have a great language study session with someone else. You'll learn more and get plenty of repeat partners, which means you can spend more time practicing and less time searching for new people to work with. Good luck!

# Day 25

## *Fill Up Your Day With Short Bursts*

On previous days, I've mentioned how important daily practice is, even if the amount of content you review isn't that big. Today we're going to really emphasize that theory and change the timing of your study sessions.

Right now, do you study once a day? Twice a day? You probably don't study five or ten times a day, do you? Well, that is exactly what we're going to figure out how to do.

I'm not talking about ten thirty minute study sessions - that would be too much. I'm talking about ten five-minute study sessions, or ten ten-minute study sessions. Little bursts that are short and sweet, but still allow you to finish a single, concrete task/goal.

Studying in small bursts is great for several reasons. First, you're putting less space between your study sessions. That means more chances to recall information and form better memories. Second, it's really easy to study for five or ten minutes at a time. Can you think of an excuse *not* to study for five or ten minutes? Third, it forces you to really focus during these study sessions: You only have 5-10 minutes, so you must concentrate to get these things done. It really makes you think about "what is important" and "what is not." There's no time for the latter.

Today's exercise is a combination of several concepts all melded into one day then injected with steroids. It has the short sessions

of the 30-30 (or in this case more like the 10-10), but it also requires Day 1's traditions to make it work. You have to come up with things throughout your day that will “set off” Japanese study. Do you study every time you come back from the restroom? Do you study at the top of every hour? Be ambitious but realistic. Set yourself up for success so you follow through.

The hardest part, of course, is fitting these little bursts into your day. Everyone has a different schedule so I can't say what's best, but in general I'd recommend more sessions for those of you who have lots of free time and fewer sessions for those of you who can't get away throughout the day.

Before you even start with doing this, though, it's absolutely imperative that you schedule your study sessions out before you do them. It's sort of like cutting all the ingredients that go into a recipe before you start cooking. That way all you have to do is grab the chopped onions and put it in the pot, rather than spend all your time preparing. If you choose what to study beforehand and get it all ready for yourself, these bursts will go a lot more smoothly for you.

One other unseen benefit of this burst-style study is that you'll often have to stop your session right when you're enjoying it the most. By stopping at this point, you're making your brain a bit angry, but it will also look forward to the next session since it got interrupted in the last one. This is actually a trick that a lot of authors use when writing. If you stop when you most want to continue, you'll be able to get started more easily the next day (or in your case, the next hour).



When you've planned out a day's worth of study, go ahead and get started. If it's too late in the day, feel free to start tomorrow. Try this out for a few days before dismissing it to see if it works for you. It'll take a little bit longer for you to see the long term benefits of this strategy, but once you get into it I think you'll see why this works better than fewer sessions throughout the day.

# Day 26

## *Plan A Massive Study Day*

Although studying in smaller sessions can be really great, especially over many weeks, months, or years, it's also possible to get a lot done in one day as well.

Sometimes the distraction of life can get in the way of everything else, and the best way to refocus and get a lot done is to dedicate a whole day or weekend to it.

Now, I don't want you to do this on a whim. Today, choose a day to dedicate entirely to Japanese study. It's fine if you're incredibly busy and need to set this day up weeks or even a month from now. The important thing is that you set it and *don't* forget it. Come up with actionable goals and tasks that you want to go through, and set yourself up for success as much as possible.

As you plan, think of this day like a work getaway, the goal of which is to get everyone off somewhere else where distractions are at a minimum. You spend entire days learning new things and refocusing for the future. Because you've dedicated the whole day to this purpose, you get a lot of big things done. You can't do these very often, though. Imagine if an office had a getaway like this *every* weekend. People would get irritated and bored, and then the trips would start to lose their effect. So, when you plan your weekend Japanese getaways, spread them out through the year. I'd say once every few 2-3 months is pretty ideal.

After you've chosen your day(s), make sure you block it off as something you *have* to do. Also make sure there aren't going to be distractions, even if that means a change in the location. Maybe your parent, roommate, or significant other has a bad habit of interrupting you every moment of the day. You're devoting a whole day to Japanese, so make it count.

When you've figured out how you're going to seclude yourself from the outside world, it's time to come up with what you want to study. I like focusing on one category for these sorts of things. One big project I can take a huge bite out of. For example, your goal for the day could be to learn a hundred kanji meanings and readings. Normally, a hundred kanji would probably normally take someone a few weeks, but when you have a distraction-free weekend, many things that aren't normally possible become possible. One hundred kanji is a big goal, but you can get it done. That's 100 out of the 2,000 kanji you need to learn. Although this is only 5%, in the grand scheme of things this is huge, and you got it done in a mere 1-2 days. If you only know 200 kanji right now, you're increasing your kanji by 50%.

While your goal should be a substantial one you won't go in unprepared. Before the weekend or day even starts, you should plan out an agenda that will help you to get it done. What time will you start? When will you break? What actions will you take to complete this goal? How proud will you feel after you've accomplished it? These are all things you should ask yourself today. Treat it like a planned event. Make sure you actually plan for it.

Your massive study day may not be for quite some time, but by tomorrow I want you to have a definite date on your calendar and a plan for the day drafted out. If you can pull one of these off even five days a year, you'll put yourself way ahead of the game for the other 360.

# Day 27

## *Get Your Questions Answered*

When people get stuck, sometimes they forget they can ask questions. Not asking questions is dumb. I think the following Chinese proverb does a good job explaining:

*“He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not ask a question remains a fool forever.”*

The worst thing you can possibly do as a self-studier when you’re learning Japanese is get stuck. You’ll become discouraged and freeze. The more time that goes by, the more likely your Japanese language learning will wither and die. We really, really don’t want that. Asking the **right** questions will get your Japanese learning out of limbo.

I’m hoping that you’ve come across a number of questions during your time learning Japanese and have a couple tucked away in your back pocket. If you don’t, give this a try real quick:

Find some aspect of Japanese that you don’t understand. Instead of simply not understanding, try to form a question (or questions) around it. Just the act of taking something you don’t understand and turning that into a question is a useful process in itself. You’ll learn more about *why* you don’t understand something, and in the future you’ll get better at coming up with more specific questions that will get you answers more quickly.

After you've formulated your question, I want you to be sure to learn what you can on your own before taking it to someone else (I'm looking at you person who emails me four times a day. You know who you are!). In other words, Google it. You may be amazed to see what people have already written on the subject. If you know what questions to ask, you'll probably find your answer or at the very least narrow down your question to the point where you can search again.

If you can't get your whole question answered on your own, there are plenty of places to get that answer from somewhere else. I'd like you to take any unanswered questions you have and ask them today. Think of this as another exercise in rejection therapy. It's not as hard as it might seem.

You'll end up finding the places that work best for you, but I have some favorites.

Quora is definitely the fanciest place to ask questions. You can ask lower level questions here, but it seems to me that the really heavy stuff is the best. Just post your question in the Japanese section and watch quality answers come in.

Yahoo Answers, the Kanji Koohii forums, and the GuideToJapanese forums are also good places to find help. Just be savvy, taking every answer or explanation with a grain of salt. One good practice is to look up more information on your question based off someone's answer (just to confirm it).

As you search for the answers to your questions, you'll come across a hundred other forums, Q&A sites, and more that you

could potentially submit to. Take note of the ones you like. Some of this is simply based on preference.

If you *really* can't find the answer to your questions online, you could try emailing someone. Feel free to email me if you'd like, and I'll do my best to help you especially if I can tell that you have actually done your own research!

Anyways, today I hope you're able to answer some of your questions. You'll get better at it with practice, believe it or not.

# Day 28

## *Concentrate Into Higher Intelligence*

What determines intelligence? Is it how much *stuff* you know? No. Intelligence is actually determined by how well you can concentrate on the right things.

This seems too simple, right? Let's think about it for a moment. In general, do the most intelligent people you know multitask? When I imagine Einstein at work, I don't picture him listening to music, talking to a friend, updating his Twitter account, and writing his equations up on a board. I picture him zeroed in on his theories, giving them his all. He's 100% focused and concentrating incredibly, incredibly hard. Oh, and I hear he was a pretty smart dude.

There's a bit of science backing this up, too.

Now, younger people tend to say that they can multi-task pretty well. They often claim to "get more done this way." To be fair, younger brains *do* cope with multitasking better than older brains, that is true. But, it's literally *physiologically impossible* to concentrate more effectively while multi-tasking than it is to concentrate on a single thing.

Here's how concentration works:

When you decide to start doing something, blood will rush to your anterior prefrontal cortex. This area of the brain is like a



switchboard. It basically sends out a signal telling your brain what to do and think. Say you want to start studying kanji. Blood would flow to your anterior prefrontal cortex, and it would tell your brain to start doing the kanji. Then Twitter makes a noise because your favorite Twitter account in the world, [@tofugu](#) replied to one of your tweets. When this happens, blood rushes into your anterior prefrontal cortex *again*, and the switchboard tells your brain to switch your focus to the tweet. Then, when you go back to studying Japanese, the process starts all over again. Blood > prefrontal cortex > switchboard > refocus.

What does this mean? It means that your brain physically can't do more than one thing at once. It needs to go through the blood > anterior prefrontal cortex > switchboard > do-it pattern every single time it changes attention. This process takes about a tenth of a second, and each switch is a tax on the brain.

So, the moral of the story is that if you are able to remove distraction you'll also become more intelligent, over time rewiring your brain to get used to the lack of distractions. It isn't a fast process, but you'll thank yourself if you put in the effort. Oh, and some icing on the cake: Scientists have found that distractions actually *create* boredom. So, the less you're able to concentrate, the more bored you become. If you don't want to be bored with your Japanese studies (and with life in general), practice concentrating. Eventually you'll get better at it and you'll find life to be a much more rewarding place. If you're the type that gets distracted easily, this practice will take time, but I think it'll be totally worth it for you.

Today, though, you're going to learn about concentration and put some of that knowledge into practice. We've already gone over some things that should help (like the chapters on 30-30 and simplifying) but we're going to take it a step further.

First, and probably predictably, I want you to eliminate the things that distract you most.

For me, my main distraction is email. I can't eliminate email, but I have figured out how to keep it from distracting me. Before, I used to check my email *constantly*. Every ten minutes or so I'd check to see if I got anything new. I was an addict. That's the only way I'm able to describe it. Every time I checked my email and found something new there, my brain would release dopamine during the excitement, further rewarding this bad behavior.

It wasn't until I hit email-rock-bottom that I turned my life around. I started to only allow myself to check email once a day, from around 12:00pm - 12:30pm. That way, the temptation was totally removed. This change limited the time I had to check and respond to emails (meaning I actually got email done a lot faster, overall) and also liberated me from having to wonder if I got anything new in my inbox. I knew that I checked my email at 12:00pm so there was no need to think about it at any other time. It became... wait for it... a tradition. Just something that I do.

You can apply this technique to all the other little webby things that constantly distract you as well. Facebook, Twitter, Reader, Tumblr - they can all be batched together into a single time slot, freeing you from their distractions throughout the rest of the day. It's really an amazing feeling when you try it out for the first time, and you'll find yourself with a lot more options.

There are also some more intense ways to remove distractions that are preventing you from concentrating.

Moving yourself entirely from distracting areas is a good way to start. I hear libraries are pretty quiet. Coffee shops are good too, if you find one with the right atmosphere.

If you're really hardcore into concentration and preventing yourself from visiting distracting websites, though, I'd recommend RescueTime. It's an application that tracks your time and tells you more about how you spend your time. Sometimes it's a huge eye-opener. Maybe you're spending 40 hours a month on Facebook. I'm sure some people do. Another good thing about RescueTime is that it allows you to block distracting sites, making it plain impossible to access them until you restart your computer.

So, today I want you to eliminate distractions. What is constantly catching your attention? Is it notifications from something? Kill it. Is it Twitter? Kill it. Is it email? Kill it. You have to be ruthless, otherwise the distractions will win. After you've gotten rid of everything, there will only be one thing left: sweet concentration and a lot of successful Japanese studies.

# Day 29

## *Try Out Passive Study*

As we near the end of our thirty days together, I thought now would be a good time to introduce the concept of passive study.

Passive study is what it sounds like: study that you don't do actively. Calling it "study" might be a bit generous, but over time you do see its positive effects. In general, passive study takes place mostly in the background. For example, you could be listening to a Japanese TV show while you're cleaning your house. It completely goes against almost everything you learned yesterday, though I can't discount it totally. It has its uses if done over long periods.

Think about all the times in the day where you're doing something that doesn't require your full attention. I'd say that these are things like driving, showering, eating, getting ready for work, and playing some kinds of video games (Minecraft, anyone?).

Doing any of these activities presents an opportunity for passive study. I bet you can come up with three or more hours per day where you have half an attention to spare. That means you could study an additional three hours per day. Though this time won't be as valuable as when you're actively studying, this is all the time that's normally wasted on other tasks, so it's free leveling up no matter how you look at it.

You're lucky, too. Materials for passive study are easy to come by.

One of my favorite resources for passive study, Japanese podcasts, are free and plentiful. Just change your store on iTunes over to Japan and you have access to all of them, for free. Personally I like the JUNK brand podcasts, but you will find the things you like over time as well. English-learning podcasts are also good, because you often get both the English and the Japanese, so lower level folks will be able to latch on and understand a little bit better.

Finding Japanese TV shows is fairly simple as well. YouTube and Vimeo have a ton, and once you find one you'll find a thousand others thanks to the related videos suggestions. Even Hulu has shows in Japanese now, though you'll have to be in the US to get access to that.

Music is also easier to get than it used to be. Music is my least favorite form of passive study, because it's not regular conversation, but it's better than nothing. You'll still learn from it, especially if you come to be able to sing along with the songs you listen to.

My point is that there's no shortage of materials out there. As I've shown in the examples above, you should have no trouble finding legal, non-pirated stuff, so you shouldn't have to resort to torrenting or anything like that (Konichiwarrrrr). The hard part of passive study is making sure you use all the content you do manage to procure. Although it may seem to be just a matter of pressing 'play', laziness can be more powerful than you may realize. The best thing you can do is make sure everything's set up so it's easy for you. In the morning, have your CD or MP3 player set up with Japanese music you chose the night before so you

have something to play while you're getting ready for work or school. Then, on your way to wherever you're going have that Japanese podcast ready to play as well. Make it a tradition to just turn it on the moment you get in the car. The same goes for when you are traveling back home. If you don't utilize passive study during every possible moment you can, it's not going to be very effective.

When you get home, turn something on again (unless you need to concentrate, then *turn it off*). Finally, before you go to sleep, listen to something else.

The main issue you'll run into is going to be your brain. All this passive learning, while fairly "easy," actually tires your brain out over time. You might be okay when you understand absolutely none of it, but when you start understanding a few words here and there, well, now your brain is *working*. When your brain has to start working, it starts getting tired.

Although mental fatigue may make you want to stop, just know that this shows that the passive study is working. Your brain is trying to make sense of the things its hearing. If you hear enough Japanese, your brain will begin attempting to sort everything out. Slowly but surely it'll begin to put puzzles together and you'll start to make connections. That's when you begin to learn.

So, today I want you to find materials for passive learning. Then, come up with new traditions for them. When you do X, you listen to Y. When you do Y, you watch Z. Etc.

If you can make this a big part of your daily routine, you'll begin to see incremental progress in other things as well. Do this for a year, and you'll notice some freaky strides in your Japanese.

# Day 30

## *Make Future Success Incredibly Easy*

Wow. It's the very last day, which means I have to provide you with a grand slam to finish things off. How about I just tell you the secret achieving success anywhere and everywhere, no matter what you're doing (though let's pretend it's about Japanese)?

We've talked about your brain in many ways up until now, but we haven't talked yet about the reptile brain versus the rational brain. The reptile brain is the lazy brain. It wants to do things the easy way. It wants to slack off. It's what's always causing you to marathon *Arrested Development* instead of studying your Japanese. I don't blame you, Netflix makes it sooo easy, and that's what the reptile brain likes: *easy*.

Your rational brain, on the other hand, is totally smart. It's the side of your brain that's saying "Hey, you should be studying Japanese, not watching TV."

But who usually ends up winning? Without fail, it's your reptile brain. There's no direct way around it. No matter how much you consciously want to remain productive, your reptile brain will win out eventually. You may hold your ground today. You may hold your ground tomorrow. But someday your rational brain will stumble and the reptile brain will be there to take advantage of that.



Here's the problem: Your reptile brain will always want to take the simple and easy way out. *Always*. Don't forget that.

Here's the solution: You should make your desired (rational) actions easier to do than your undesired actions.

Say you get home and you're supposed to study your SRS reviews. Your rational brain knows this, but your reptile brain tells you it wants to watch television instead. So, you go watch TV and never study your SRS reviews because it's easier (remember, reptile likes *easy*).

The solution? I know it sounds crazy, but get rid of your TV. Or, if you can't bring yourself to do that, unplug your TV and turn it around. In effect, this makes studying your SRS reviews *easier* than watching TV, especially when you already set up your computer for Japanese study on Day 23. What if you get rid of your TV and you run into some other thing that takes its place? Let's say it's some Words With Friends. I'm sorry, but you know what you have to do. Kill it. Your rational brain has the power to continue doing this until the desired action is actually the easiest action. Once you do this, you win. If you don't, you lose.

Let's take a look at another example. Your rational brain wants you to listen to podcasts in the car to and from work to get that passive study in. But your reptile brain only wants to listen to Flight Of The Concorde (understandable). What should you do to make listening to Japanese podcasts easier than listening to this music? You should remove all non-Japanese podcasts from your music player. That way your only choice is Japanese podcasts. So, what do you think you'll listen to? Probably Japanese podcasts. It's not only the desired action, but it's the easy way out, too. Your

reptile brain won't even be that upset. It's not that picky, as long as it gets the easiest way out, which is your passive study. Nice!

What's the overall lesson here? You need to make what you *should* be doing easier than what you shouldn't be doing, even if it requires some extreme measures. Here's some other ideas for how to accomplish this today.

1. Take your Japanese studies out and get them ready to go for your next study sessions so that there's nothing to prepare. If it's all ready to go, it's really *easy* to get started.
2. Decide what you're going to study and work on the day before you work on it. That way there's no room for "oh, I don't know what to do next," so it can wait.
3. Hire a tutor to keep you accountable. It's much easier to tell yourself that you don't need to study. It's much harder to tell a tutor why you *didn't* study.
4. Choose 100 kanji and create some kind of way to test your knowledge on it. Then, create an agreement with a friend saying that you'll give them \$500 if you can't pass the test at 90% accuracy. Unless you're Richie Rich, shelling out \$500 is going to be harder than studying and learning those 100 kanji in a week. Make sure your friend holds you accountable, that's what friends are for, right?
5. Get rid of distractions, just like we talked about on Day 28. Every distraction is an opportunity to break and let your reptile brain take control.

6. Think about completion before you even start. This will help you to trick your reptile brain into thinking the hard task is the fun and exciting one.
7. Figure out what tempts you. Be ruthless. Get rid of those things. Your reptile brain will tell you “NO NO NO NO NO” but your rational brain knows that it’s for the best, right? Be strong.
8. Hide all your clocks while you study. Your reptile brain will try to rationalize stopping by saying that you’ve already studied for X amount of time. If you study without knowing the time, you’ll enjoy it more and study more.

More important than any of these individual things, though, is the ability to notice when your reptile brain is winning. If you think of your reptile brain and your rational brain as the same thing, you’ll fail miserably and be miserable, too. If you know they’re separate, and you notice when the reptile brain starts to take control, you will be able to identify what it is that the reptile brain wants. Take note of what this is and then come up with a way to fix it. The actions you’re forced to take may seem extreme at first, but it’s worth it if it helps you to reach your goal. Which is better, a no-TV house or fluency in Japanese in a year? I think the answer is obvious, but that’s my rational brain thinking.

# Day X

## *Bonus Days*

In the future, there will be bonus days added to this ebook. As someone who has purchased this ebook sometime in the past, you'll get these bonus days for free, though they aren't quite available yet just yet (which is why you're seeing this message).

Be sure to check back at <http://tofugu.com> to see if any new versions of this ebook have come out, and if they have, just re-download the ebook using the url you received in your email and you should get the updates as well.

If you pirated this book, you probably won't have that email, but I bet someone will be nice enough to put a new version of this ebook up on the torrenting sites soon. At least, we can only hope, matey. Yarrrr.

So, check back for bonus days in the near future! Keep studying hard and keep trying new strategies out!

# Thank you!

I just wanted to say thank you for purchasing this ebook! I hope you enjoyed it and I hope you got a few really good things from it. Take the things that worked well for you and make them your own. Mold them to how *you* study Japanese so that you can study Japanese even more effectively. Once those become ingrained into you and how you do things, you can always come back to add a few more. What's important is that you tried a lot of strategies and figured out what worked well for you.

I believe that if you take a lot of these strategies to heart, you can really, really cut down the amount of time to fluency. It's never going to be easy, but there's so much you can do to make your studies more effective, so I hope I helped you to do that. You'll always have to study hard and work hard, but you knew that from the beginning right? Keep at it, and hit me up if I can ever be of any help.

Anyways, thank you so much again for getting this ebook. Be sure to check back for additional bonus days too. I have more chapters rattling around inside my brain still, so I'll be sharing them with you soon.

じゃね！

Koichi