

# Lesson 4: Sentence Structure and Particles 1

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Links to the video lesson version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh1FEfCwM-g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pxkv7-R1IOM>



## Learning Objectives

- ❖ Understanding SOV sentence structure
- ❖ Understanding particles
- ❖ Learning some basic particles

## Vocabulary For This Lesson

あなた | anata | you  
私 | わたし | watashi | I  
僕 | ぼく | boku | I  
飴 | あめ | ame | candy  
食べる | たべる | taberu | (v.) to eat  
飲む | のむ | nomu | (v.) to drink  
バナナ | banana | banana  
ポテト | poteto | potato  
美味しい | おいしい | oishii | tasty  
お茶 | おちゃ | ocha | tea  
母 | はは | haha | mother  
ファン | ふあん | fan | fan  
学生 | がくせい | gakusei | student  
誰 | だれ | dare | who  
先生 | せんせい | sensei | teacher

## Sentence Structure

Japanese sentence structure is different from English sentence structure.

In English, the order is usually "I eat candy" (Subject-Verb-Object).

In Japanese, it's 私は飴を食べる (わたしはあめをたべる / watashi wa ame wo taberu.) - Literally, "I candy eat." (**Subject-Object-Verb**)

📌 *Japanese uses SOV order.*

The verb always comes at the end, except in some artistic expressions, like when you hear "down to the ground, he fell" in English.

The random hiragana in between the vocabulary are called particles. They are extremely important, and they tell you the function of the word before them.

### What is a conjugation?

A conjugation changes the end of a verb. It can change the meaning, tense, number, etc. In English, eg. "going" would be a conjugation of "go". In Japanese, the okurigana trailing after the kanji can be conjugated (eg. 食べる taberu > 食べられる taberareru).

### ? Question ?

What is the difference between English and Japanese sentence structure?

### ○ Answer ○

English is SVO, while Japanese is SOV. The verb always comes last in Japanese.

## 「は」Topic Particle

は is usually pronounced "HA", but when it acts as the topic particle, it is pronounced "WA".

This particle identifies the topic, or what you're talking about in the sentence. You usually place "watashi" (or any other form of "I") before this, indicating that you're talking about yourself.

In addition, when you put a noun like "potato" before it, the topic becomes "potatoes (in general)". The key part is "in general". If you want to talk about your pet potato and not just any potato, you use the identifier particle.

📌 *In English a literal translation for it can be "as for X". The sentence in general is about what comes before は.*

## ? Question ?

Identify the topic in this sentence. What does it mean in English?

“バナナは美味しい／バナナはおいしい／Banana wa oishii.”

## ○ Answer ○

“Banana” is the topic, the sentence refers to bananas in general.

Translation “Bananas are delicious”

## 「を」Object - Verb

Whatever comes before を is the DIRECT object, and a verb always comes after を. Direct object means that the verb is doing something directly to it.

To put it in simple terms, the object is the recipient of the action.

### Example

(私は)飴を食べる／(わたしは)あめをたべる／Ame wo taberu”

= (I) eat candy.

私 is the subject, or the one performing the action. 食べる is the action, and 飴 is the object, the recipient of that action.

✿ 私は is in brackets because often the topic is omitted in Japanese sentences if you can figure out from context what is being talked about

## ? Question ?

Identify the direct object and the verb:

お茶を飲む／おちゃをのむ／Ocha wo nomu.

## ○ Answer ○

Direct object: Ocha, tea

Verb: nomu, to drink.

Translation: I drink tea.

## 「も」Inclusive Particle

も means “also” or “too”. It includes another topic in the discussion.

### Example

A: “I am a student.”

B: “I am also a student.”

B just included themselves into the same “student” group as A. To add another topic (in this case, B) to the conversation, B has to use the inclusive particle.

A: “私は学生です／わたしはがくせいです／Watashi wa gakusei desu.”

B: “私も学生です／わたしもがくせいです／Watashi MO gakusei desu.”

What if B ISN'T a student? That's a different conversation and a different topic, so B has to use the usual topic particle.

A: “私は学生です／わたしはがくせいです／Watashi wa gakusei desu.”

B: “私は学生ではありません／わたしはがくせいではありません／Watashi WA gakusei dewa arimasen.” (I am not a student. Or literally: As for me, not a student)

If B's declaration matches A's, then B can use も. If not, B uses は to introduce a new conversation..

### ? Question ?

Reply to the following question in Japanese: “あなたもポテトですか／Anata mo poteto desuka?”  
Are you also a potato?

Formula: “Hai, watashi (insert particle) poteto desu.” Yes, I am also a potato.

“Iie, watashi (insert particle) poteto dewa arimasen.” No, I am not a potato.

### ○ Answer ○

はい、わたしもポテトです。

OR

いいえ、わたしはポテトではありません。

## 「の」Possessive Particle

の indicates who something belongs to. Whoever it belongs to goes before の, and whatever the thing is goes after.

### Example

- ❖ 私のポテト／わたしのポテト／watashi no poteto (my potato)
- ❖ 僕の母／ぼくのはは／boku no haha (my mother)
- ❖ サメ先生のファン／Shark-sensei no fan (Shark-sensei's fan)

### ? Question ?

Tell me something that is yours.

### ○ Answer ○

わたしのX

## 「が」Identifier Particle

This is the particle that trips people up every single time they begin learning Japanese. This particle identifies something that was unspecified. In other words, you use this when you don't know what the topic is.

“Who is the teacher?” You would use が here: 誰が先生Dare ga sensei desuka?

If you said, “dare wa sensei desuka?”, you would be saying “Is who the teacher?” That doesn't make sense, as “who” isn't a person. (You made “dare” the topic because it is in front of “wa”.)

は and が can often be interchangeable but some differences can be where the focus is put in the sentence.

“What do you think about cats?”

猫は好きです As for cats, I like them

We've already established cats are the topic, so the は indicates this and then makes 好き the focus, because we're describing what we think about them.

“What is something that you like?”

猫が喜欢です Cats are what I like

Out of a range of things you could pick to say you like, you picked cats, this is the focus of the sentence so it's been marked with が.

## ? Question ?

あなたはスマホがありますか？ / Anata wa sumaho ga arimasu ka? = Do you have a smartphone?

Formula: Hai, sumaho (particle) arimasu. Yes, I have a smartphone.

lie, sumaho (article) arimasen. No, I don't have a smartphone .

Do you have a smartphone? If you do, answer with the first response and fill in the appropriate particle. If you don't have a smartphone, use the second response.

*Hint: if you DON'T have a smartphone, you shouldn't use the identifier particle....*

## ○ Answer ○

はい、スマホがあります。

OR

いいえ、スマホはありません。

## Formulas to learn

These are the basic sentence structures for the particles we have learned today.

- ❖ Topic は Object/description です。
- ❖ Other topic も Object/description です。
- ❖ Newly identified topic が Object/description です。
- ❖ Group の specific item belonging to group は Object/description です。
- ❖ Topic は Object を Verb.



## Summary

- ❖ Japanese sentence structure uses SOV order
- ❖ Particles mark the purpose of the word before it in the sentence
- ❖ は is the topic particle
- ❖ を is the object particle
- ❖ も is the inclusive particle
- ❖ の is the possessive particle
- ❖ が is the identifier/subject particle
- ❖ Conjugation alters the ending of words changing their meaning and tense



## Homework

- 1) Read this blog on wa vs ga <<http://aminoapps.com/p/zcgxa6>>
- 2) Do this worksheet  
<<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hLnOog3q7Py0rh86WY-yZnWEKWYPza9ITshHfY-jhK4/edit?usp=sharing>>
- 3) Check beginner homework 3  
<<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Uq7QXWe5gjsV9NRGHRfsYPqhObItpaphXKOA-mcsShWc/edit?usp=sharing>>



## Extra Resources

Please read Tofugu's blogs if you'd like extra information on は vs が

- ❖ JapanesePod101 <<https://www.japanesepod101.com/japanese-particles/>>
- ❖ は and が - Tofugu <<https://www.tofugu.com/japanese/wa-and-ga/>>
- ❖ は and が - Japanese Ammo with Misa (video) <<https://youtu.be/FknmUij6ZIk>>
- ❖ を - JapanesePod101 (video) <<https://youtu.be/3b29dqY8pMY>>
- ❖ も - JapanesePod101 (video) <<https://youtu.be/W68QomjbzUY>>
- ❖ の JapanesePod101 (video) <<https://youtu.be/9J4FL1CbXTg>>
- ❖ Kensei Sensei Part 1 (video) <<https://youtu.be/Wh1FEfCwM-g>>
- ❖ Kensei Sensei Part 2 (video) <<https://youtu.be/Pxkv7-R1IOM>>