

102: Reading

Assignments

- Find something to read that you like - song lyrics, reddit, merchandise packaging... - and post that here in a comment
- Fill out the vocabulary table
- Practice reading your kana
- Attempt a translation if you feel up to it! Post it here, ask questions.

Reading

With basic hiragana and katakana skills out of the way, it's pretty much time to just find some stuff and read. A lot. It's hard as adults to just pick up and read something: we're not children learning in a native environment or picking stuff up incrementally from texts catered to us. Foreign language texts for adults tend to be *frustratingly* dry or just straight up condescending.

In my experience, one of the most useful things to read have been - hilariously - those bad phrasebooks you pick up at airports. But it makes sense: phrasebooks, by definition, regurgitate *commonly used phrases*. They are the core lego blocks of what you need to survive in real life, as opposed to textbooks that want to teach you phrases like global warming or whatever. Once you jazz that up with some incidental knowledge of grammar, you're in a much better position than someone trying to conquer Chapter 1 - 10 of Boring Textbook, at least in my opinion.

Part of that also comes from the auditory exposure you'll get by learning things that are real. *Hearing* something you're learning adds another layer of memorisation/recall, and so that's what I'll try to aim for with these exercises: content first, vocabulary second, grammar third.

Get Some Content

Time to pick your poison. Maybe try [Reddit's Japanese Today I Learned](#) and pick a piece you want to read. Use Chrome's Rikaikun extension to help yourself with the kanji and vocabulary; paste the whole thing here in a comment and we can step through it. Or look at websites for things you like in Japanese (IDK, fountain pen stuff?) and find something that you'd buy in real life.

Test Run

For now, I'm going to stick to one of the ways I learned Japanese before I ever learned Japanese, which is blindly picking an anime pop song that earwormed me, no matter how ridiculous, and learning from there.

I'm going to go with [UVERworld's D-technoLife](#) to show how truly out of touch with current anime I am. Hi, BLEACH fans!

Oldness of the source material aside, I've picked this song for a couple of reasons:

- The lead sings every syllable pretty clearly. Do not, for example, try this with - say - Asian Kungfu Generation just yet.
- The chorus and bridges both are catchy and contain lots of phrases that you'll encounter a lot. Like how you'll hear *corazón* in Spanish.
- It sticks in my head, so it's free mnemonics for me

Another thing is that Animelyrics.com provides romaji *and* kanji, so if you get stuck on kanji lookup you can cheat and just do this for now. Let's step through it. I'm picking the chorus for this assignment.

Before jumping in, listen to the video a couple of times and try to avoid the translation until you're done with your own.

REAL LIFE:

癒えない 痛み 悲しみで キズついた 君
もう笑えないなんて 人嫌いなんて 言葉そう言わないで
見えない未来に起こる事 全てに意味があるから
今はそのままでもいい きっと気づける 時が来るだろ

KANA ONLY:

いえない いたみ かなしみ で キズ ついた きみ よ
もう わらえない なんて ひときらい なんて ことば そう いわないで
みえない みらい に おこること すべて いみ が ある から
いま は そのままでもいい きっと きづけるとき が くる だろ

First up: I've spaced the words out so that you don't get saturated trying to fight and figure out where one word ends and a particle begins. It's important to know that you want to get away from this and towards reading the giant chunk of united text sooner rather than later, but I've got two things to say to that:

One: kanji form natural separators, and without it, you're going to have a bad time. Until you're learning more kanji, don't feel bad about having a headache with kana-only chunks. I'd sure as hell get a headache if I had to read English without fullstops.

Two: known vocabulary and grammatical structures will do the same thing in time. Once you start recognising things like common particles, negations (ない) and tenses, reading will be better.

In the *meantime*, trying to fight all those battles - reading kana, reading kanji, recognising vocabulary, recognising grammar - *all at the same time* is frustrating and super duper uber unfun. So I'm going to try to cut shit down as much as possible so that you can focus on what matters at the current point you find yourself.

語彙・ごい・Vocabulary

I'm going to fill out some of this, and leave the rest to you as an exercise in preparation for GRAMMAR!

Using Rikaikun, use a dictionary service (like jisho.org) to find out the type of verb (click Show Inflections) - ichidan or godan. Take note of it in your table but don't worry until next week.

Happily enough, *all* of these words are fairly common and worth knowing.

Original Word → Form In The Lyrics	Kana	Translation
癒える → 癒えない Verb, ichidan	いえる	To heal, to be healable -> To <i>not</i> heal; to not be healable
痛み	いたみ	Pain. Noun form of 痛む, to hurt
悲しみ	かなしみ	
～で		
キズ		Injury. Written in katakana for emphasis.
つく → ついた		
君	きみ	
～よ Particle		(Emphasis)
もう Adverb		Already.
笑う → 笑えない		
なんて Suffix/adverb		Such-like, something like
人 Noun	ひと	Person

嫌い	きらい	
言葉	ことば	
そう		
言う → 言わないで		
見える → 見えない	みえる	
未来	みらい	The future
～に		
起こる	おこる	
こと		
全て	すべて	
意味	いみ	
～が		
ある		
から		
今	いま	
～は		
そのままでもいい		
きっと		
気付ける	きづける	
時	とき	Time
来る	くる	To come
です → だろう		To be
Verb		~ will likely be

103: Basic Grammar

Assignment

- Get a general sense of how verb conjugation works: stem + modifier
- Learn the difference between ichidan and godan verbs
- Drill a lot

By this point, you've probably struggle-boated through a lot of dictionary lookups and attempts at translating with no ropes. Now for grammar! It's a little backwards to have got you working on real texts *before* bringing in any actual ability to parse them, but in this case I think reading over constructions first helps: you've done the dirty work, and the bricks-and-mortar will (hopefully) come along more easily for it. Less fear of reading "real stuff" and more actually reading it and coping with uncertainty around what's still unknown.

So onwards!

Advanced warning that most of this post is exploratory: I'm going to talk a bit about Japanese verbs in general before ever touching something concrete. It's all going to be very far from what you'll get in most English textbooks and grammars.

My hope is that what this post *will* do is give anyone reading a starting point into the grammar that is grounded on the 五十音 table. We'll work from the top down, going by **sound** as opposed to tenses and verb forms.

On Verbs

Luckily for all involved, Japanese is fairly easy to read because verbs are - with a few, notable exceptions - incredibly regular. Once you conquer verbs, particles, auxiliary stuff, and nouns will fall like dominos.

Because they're so regular, they're also fun to drill and easy to look up. I'm going to lay out a lot of information, but in a way that's a little bit closer to the way it's [taught natively](#) than what you'll see in textbooks.

English language textbooks are going to, by and large, start out with the Big Few Irregular Verbs - する (to do) ・ ある (to exist - inanimate) ・ くる (to come) ・ だ (to be, is). They're irregular because they don't conjugate the way all other verbs do.

That's well and good: those verbs are *incredibly* common and important. But, I figure, if you're going to spend time learning grammar - learn the standards. So we're going to treat the exceptions as things, like kana, to be Blindly Memorised. Because they are! We'll cover them next lesson.

Regular Verbs - ichidan and godan

In the *meantime*, we're going to start with the two types of regular verbs: 一段(いち・だん)と五段(ご・だん). The いち **one** and ご **five** are significant: 一段 verbs have a single, unchanging stem that's used in all conjugations. 五段 verbs have stems that require mutation in order to achieve different conjugations.

Let's see what this means in a table...

Conjugated Form of...	Ichidan たべる	Godan いく
Negative	たべ・ない	いか・ない
Polite	たべ・ます	いき・ます
Dictionary	たべる	いく
Hypothetical	たべれ・ば	いけ・ば
Volitional	たべろ・う	いこ・う
Past	たべた	いった

That a - i - u - e - o line sure looks familiar, don't it?

Takeaways:

- **Ichidan** verbs have a stem that doesn't change when conjugated. They often end in る, which is why some English textbooks refer to them as -ru verbs.
- **Godan** verbs do require a stem change, and step through the five vowel sounds to do so. English textbooks call these -u verbs because of that.

I'm going to stay away from the -ru and -u verb terminology because it makes not much sense. For one, some godan verbs end in -ru anyway! For another, what does -u mean? Nothing.

Q: How do I tell if something's ichidan or godan?

A: Practice and exposure. When you see 〜いる or 〜える, it's likely to be ichidan. Other than that, it's a matter of listening and reading a lot. Plenty of guides out there offer [means](#) and [ways](#) to help.

Sidenote: What The Hell Is This Table, K

The table lays out ways of getting a verb into a verb form. Japanese conjugates and [agglutinates](#) to do what it does. If you've done a classical language, this is all going to be pretty familiar. Take a stem, modify it a bit, throw some stuff on it, boom.

I'm going to lay out grammar based on the table because there are plenty of resources out there for when you want to learn precisely how to get to a particular verb form you're interested in. It's really good for two things in particular:

- It builds on the 五十音;
- It covers a bunch of the common verb forms;
- It reminds us that there are more to verbs than just tense!
- It reminds us that Japanese has a plain (dictionary) form and a polite form.

Sidenote: Dictionary versus Polite Form?!

Yup! Japanese comes in flavours. Plain, dictionary Japanese conjugates one way, polite Japanese in another. There's no real English equivalent. It's exactly what it says on the tin: a difference in formality and style with just some grammar to spice it up. There's more to it, but we don't need to worry about it for now.

Gotta Start Somewhere: Negative + Negative Past

Let's start with the top, あ-sound row of the table and practice **negation**. We'll get the most bang for your buck by practicing both plain and polite forms. This is a good time to just drill like a drone and memorise the sounds.

Godan

行く (い・く) To go

Form	Dictionary	Polite
Negative To not go	行かない	行きません
Negative past Did not go	行かなかった	行きませんでした

Dictionary Form

- Negative: あ stem + ~ない
- Negative past: あ stem + ~なかった

Polite Form

- Negative: い stem + ません

- Negative past: い stem + ませんでした

Example:

笑う(わら・う)

笑わない・笑わなかった

笑いません・笑いませんでした

Practice:

- 言う(い・う)
- 起こる(お・こる)

Ichidan

食べる (た・べる) To eat

Form	Dictionary	Polite
Negative To not eat	食べない	食べません
Negative past Did not eat	食べなかった	食べませんでした

Ichidan verbs are even easier. Since the stem never changes, just take the stem (all you have to do is drop the る) and stick on the conjugation.

Dictionary Form

- Negative: stem + ~ない
- Negative past: stem + ~なかった

Polite Form

- Negative: stem + ません
- Negative past: stem + ませんでした

Practice:

- いる
- できる
- 癒える(い・える)

All practice verbs come from either the song or the passage you picked! You'll notice there aren't many from your passage - that's because **formal** Japanese (moar polite! moar polite than polite Japanese!) has a whole different set of special-use verbs and conjugations. It's why I picked a song - it's easier to find actual examples of beginner grammar.

Drilling Practice

Pick as many as you want to drill from

<https://nihongoichiban.com/2011/08/21/list-of-all-verbs-for-the-jlpt-n5/> and practice.

Try to practice the whole range of sounds for godan verbs. For example:

- あう - to meet
- あく - to open
- だす - to take out/to hand in
- たつ - to stand
- しぬ - to die
- すむ - to live/to reside at