



Mirai Japanese: "Changing the Way People Learn Japanese"

iStart Japanese - Step 1 - Lesson 0 (Prologue)

Tom:

Welcome to Mirai Language Systems' "iStart Japanese", a beginner-level course in Japanese.

This is the Prologue to Step 1 of the course.

This course was designed and recorded by our team in Tokyo, Japan.

My name is Tom, and I'm your English speaking guide for this program. I am here with our Japanese speaking guide, Takako.

More information on this course is available at our website at:

www.MiraiJapanese.com

With its unique approach, Mirai Language Systems strives to change the way people learn languages.

Central to the methodology of Mirai Language Systems are three principles:

- The first principle is that language learning should be fun, stimulating, and enjoyable.
- The second principle is that language instruction should be logical, well-paced, and consistent.
- And the third principle is that language instruction should be goal-oriented - with the goal of making you, the learner, functionally proficient in actually speaking and understanding Japanese people and their language.

With these principles in mind, we aim to make your Japanese learning experience as enjoyable and efficient as possible!

Let's continue by introducing you to our native Japanese speaking guide, Takako...

Takako:

Hello Everyone! My name is Takako, and I'm your native Japanese speaking guide for this course.

Konnichi wa!

Tom:

The main part of instruction comes by way of a dialog between Takako and me in each lesson.

Often, I will say something like "How do you say XYZ in Japanese?"...

And then Takako will give you the answer in Japanese.

Copy her pronunciation and intonation as closely as you possibly can.

This way, your Japanese will sound accurate and natural, and you will be well



understood by Japanese people.

Now let's start this lesson by introducing the basics of the Japanese writing system.

Japanese use several different types of symbols, or scripts, for writing their language. The basis of the Japanese writing system comes from China. The Chinese use complex symbols - so-called pictograms - to represent ideas and things. These Chinese characters evolved over thousands of years, and some can be quite complex, requiring many brush-strokes to draw them.

The Japanese adapted the Chinese characters and called them 「kanji」 . Listen to Takako say the word 「kanji」 , and then imitate her...

Takako:
kanji

Tom:

Each kanji has meaning - it represents a concept or a physical object - and is assigned one or more pronunciations - usually called "readings".

To read Japanese, you will need to learn the meanings and readings of the most commonly used kanji.

To completely read a Japanese newspaper, about 2000 kanji need to be learned.

This is the most difficult aspect of learning Japanese - even Japanese people struggle with kanji, and spend many years at school studying them.

However, kanji have some fantastic advantages: they are very compact - each individual kanji character represents a concept or thing; and they also can look quite beautiful. You will be introduced to kanji at a later stage in the Beginner Course.

In addition to kanji, the Japanese developed two alphabets to represent the sounds of the Japanese language.

These alphabets are called "syllabaries", since nearly all characters of these alphabets consist of a syllable.

The characters of each of these two syllabaries correspond to each other, and there are a total of 46 characters in each, in modern Japanese.

One of the syllabaries is used for writing words derived from foreign countries. These words are often called "loan words".

The characters look somewhat "angular", and the syllabary is called 「katakana」 .

Takako:
katakana

Tom:

The second of the two Japanese syllabaries is used for grammatical particles and for verb conjugations, among other things.

These characters are more "curvilinear" in appearance, and the syllabary is called 「hiragana」 .

Takako:
hiragana

Tom:

When we write Japanese in English letters (actually they are Roman, or Latin, letters), we use a system for doing so.

There are several accepted systems for transliterating Japanese into English.



We have chosen to use a modified version of the "Hepburn System", named after James Curtis Hepburn of the late 19th century, who compiled Japanese-English dictionaries. This system makes it easy to write down Japanese words in English so that they sound as close as possible to the original Japanese pronunciation. However, no romanization system completely preserves the sound quality of real Japanese, so please always imitate Japanese speakers as closely as possible.

Now, the Japanese call Roman letters 「rōmaji」.

Takako:

rōmaji

Tom:

The sound of the first vowel extends over two syllables, which is why we write a "macron" over the "o", to signify that it is double the length of the sound: 「rō」.

In Japan, you will often see signs with both Japanese script and Roman letters, especially in major cities.

That was a short introduction to the Japanese writing system.

To summarize the words introduced in this lesson, we started with the Japanese expression for "hello; Good Day!"...

Takako:

konnichi wa

Tom:

"Chinese characters"...

Takako:

kanji

Tom:

the Japanese script, which uses angular strokes, and is used mainly for loan words...

Takako:

katakana

Tom:

and the Japanese script, which is more curvilinear in appearance, used for grammatical markers and verb conjugations...

Takako:

hiragana

Tom:

Also, we looked at the Japanese word for Roman characters (or Latin letters)...

Takako:

rōmaji

Tom:

Now, please continue by looking at our website at www.MiraiJapanese.com for some more reminders of the vocab introduced in this lesson.



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Please don't worry if you didn't take in all the information the first time. You can repeat this Podcast as often as you like. In fact, we recommend that you play each lesson at least a couple of times before moving on to the next lesson.

Please remember that you determine the pace of your learning - and that effective learning takes place when you are relaxed and your interest is stimulated.

Please also check out our iPhone Application for this course, from which this Podcast material was taken. The iPhone App contains these Podcast dialogs, with additional functionality for learning how to write Japanese, and also an interactive quiz to test and reinforce your learning.

This great iPhone Application is available from the iTunes App Store, under the name "*iStart Japanese*".

The music provided in this podcast was taken from "Woody's Way Today", by ALBaMass, courtesy of Mevio's Music Alley at their website "music.mevio.com".

We hope you enjoyed this Podcast and we look forward to your comments at **MiraiJapanese.com**! Goodbye for now!