



**Mirai Japanese: "Changing the Way People Learn Japanese"**

## **iStart Japanese - Step 1 - Lesson 1**

**Tom:**

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

This is Lesson 1 of the course.

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](http://www.MiraiJapanese.com)**

Here's Takako...

**Takako:**

*Konnichi wa!*

**Tom:**

Let's start by covering some very important pronunciation for Japanese.

The Japanese language has relatively few sounds.

It uses only five vowel sounds, far fewer than English.

Let's listen to Takako pronounce the five vowel sounds...

**Takako:**

*a*  
*i*  
*u*  
*e*  
*o*

**Tom:**

Five sounds: 「a-i-u-e-o」. That's all!

Let's listen to Takako say the vowels again...

**Takako:**

*a*  
*i*  
*u*  
*e*  
*o*

**Tom:**

Great! Now it is important to remember to pronounce these vowel sounds exactly the way Takako did when speaking Japanese.

If you pronounce the vowels like they sound in English, you will find that Japanese people will have difficulties understanding you.

Okay, let's move on to talking about words that the Japanese have taken from countries other than China.



There are many of these, and they are often called "loan words".  
For example, the word "camera" has been imported into Japanese, and they pronounce it...

**Takako:**

*kamera*

**Tom:**

While the word as the Japanese pronounce it is quite recognizable to us, there are some differences...

**Takako:**

*kamera*

**Tom:**

In English, we say "camera".

The most noticeable difference in pronunciation is perhaps the fact that the Japanese pronounce each of the three syllables with the same intensity, the same stress...

**Takako:**

*ka-me-ra*

**Tom:**

Another noticeable difference is the clarity of the sequence of the vowel sounds of the word 「ka-me-ra」, namely 「a-e-a」.

**Takako:**

*a-e-a*

*ka-me-ra*

**Tom:**

Thirdly, but this is much more difficult for learners of Japanese to pick up, is that Japanese people use two tones for pronouncing words - high, and low.  
Listen to the word for "camera" carefully again, and try to hear the high and low tones...

**Takako:**

*ka-me-ra*

**Tom:**

The tone sequence is: high-low-low...

**Takako:**

*ka-me-ra*

**Tom:**

However, you don't need to worry about this too much. There are very few words in Japanese where changing the tones of the word will change the meaning.

In fact, Japanese is spoken with a relatively flat intonation, compared to other languages.

So, for the most part, you can forget about the tonal variation, in all but very few words. English, in comparison to Japanese, carries a lot more intonation.

More important than tones, please remember that each syllable in Japanese is pronounced with about the same amount of stress, and duration.

To sound as natural in Japanese as possible, please mimic our native Japanese speaking guide, Takako, as closely as possible.

Now let's move on to another "loan word."

The Japanese word for "bar", as in a place where you go for a drink is...



**Takako:**

*bā*

**Tom:**

Let's hear the word for "bar" again...

**Takako:**

*bā*

**Tom:**

Note that the 「ā」 sound in 「bā」 is long...

**Takako:**

*ba-a*

**Tom:**

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

Good. Let's add another word to our vocabulary.

The word for "hotel" is...

**Takako:**

*hoteru*

**Tom:**

Let's hear the word for "hotel" again...

**Takako:**

*hoteru*

**Tom:**

Notice that the "l" sound in "hotel" changes to 「ru」 in Japanese.

First, Japanese people don't have two different sounds like the English "l" and "r" sounds.

They have a sound which is somewhat in between the English "l" and "r" sounds, somewhat closer to the "r" sound, which is why we romanize it with the letter "r".

Second, Japanese nearly always follow a consonant sound with a vowel for their syllables.

So to get the closest approximation to the English sound, they add a 「u」 sound to their "r", and it becomes...

**Takako:**

*ru*

**Tom:**

So "hotel" becomes...

**Takako:**

*hoteru*

**Tom:**

Another frequently used loan word in Japanese is the word for "coffee"...

**Takako:**

*kōhī*

**Tom:**

Let's hear the word for "coffee" again...



**Takako:**

*kōhī*

**Tom:**

Both vowel sounds of 「kōhī」 are elongated, which you can see from the macrons on the 「rōmaji」.

Also, the "fee" sound in "coffee" is romanized as 「hī」, because that is closer to the Japanese pronunciation.

Let's introduce the final word for this lesson, another commonly used loan word.

It's the Japanese for "orange juice"...

**Takako:**

*orenji-jūsu*

**Tom:**

Let's hear the word for "orange juice" again...

**Takako:**

*orenji-jūsu*

**Tom:**

In Japanese, the pronunciation of this word is long, spanning seven syllables...

**Takako:**

*o-re-n-ji-ju-u-su*

**Tom:**

You may be surprised to see that the 「n」 is a full syllable.

In Japanese, this 「n」 is pronounced with about the same length as any other full syllable.

Listen to Takako pronounce the syllabic 「n」 ...

**Takako:**

*n*

**Tom:**

This 「n」, along with the five pure vowel sounds 「a-i-u-e-o」 are the only single-sound syllables in Japanese.

The other basic kana sounds consist of a consonant sound (like "t" or "k"), followed by a vowel sound.

To summarize, in this lesson we introduced the Japanese words for "camera"...

**Takako:**

*kamera*

**Tom:**

"bar" ...

**Takako:**

*bā*

**Tom:**

"hotel" ...

**Takako:**

*hoteru*



**Tom:**  
"coffee"...

**Takako:**  
*kōhī*

**Tom:**  
and "orange juice"...

**Takako:**  
*orenji-jūsū*

**Tom:**  
In addition, we looked at the basics of pronouncing Japanese.

Now, please continue by looking at our website at [www.MiraiJapanese.com](http://www.MiraiJapanese.com) for some more information on the vocabulary introduced in this lesson, as well as some details on writing in Japanese.

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".**

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