

Conversational Japanese Lesson 1

The following conversations will help you to start conversations with Japanese speakers, make general inquiries and learn appropriate greetings for different settings.

For the hiragana version of this document, check [here](#). Don't know hiragana or Katakana?

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Conversation 1: Saying hello

Our first short conversation is between a student, Oda, and his teacher Professor Uesugi, who happened to meet each other on the street.

小田君： お早うございます， 上杉先生。
上杉先生： ああ， お早うございます 小田君。

Oda-kun: Ohayou gozaimasu, Uesugi-sensei.
Uesugi-sensei: Aa, ohayou gozaimasu, Oda-kun.

Oda: Good morning Professor Uesugi.
Prof. Uesugi: Oh, good morning Oda.

The appropriate greeting here is determined by the time of day. In the morning, Japanese say: "Ohayou gozaimasu", which literally means: "It's early isn't it?" This is generally used until about 10 A.M. After that, the Japanese use "kon'nichi wa", which means "Good day". After sunset, at around 6 or 7 P.M., they use "konban wa", which is the equivalent of "Good evening." The table below summarizes this information.

Table 1: Time-related Greetings

お早うございます	Ohayou gozaimasu	Good morning
今日は	Kon'nichi wa	Good day
今晚は	Konban wa	Good evening

Since Oda already knows who he's talking to, he repeats the name of the person after "Ohayou gozaimasu". Since Oda is a student, and mister Uesugi is his Professor, he has to address him by his title. In Japanese, the affix (the word after the name) is determined by social status and personal relationships. Oda uses "Uesugi-sensei", "sensei" meaning Professor. Sensei is used for teachers in any kind of form, and also for doctors and writers. The following table has the generally used affixes.

Table 2: Name affixes

さん	San	Mr. or Mrs.
君	Kun	Boy (young master)
様	Sama	Polite Mr. or Mrs.
ちゃん	Chan	Girl (miss)
先生	Sensei	Prof. Md. Polite

Since Japanese social structure is so complicated it would be best to address adults as "san" and kids as "kun" or "chan". In later lessons we will discuss social structure in a more detailed way.

In his response, Prof. Uesugi begins with "Aa", which is the Japanese form of "oh!" Since Oda is of a much lower social class it is okay for Prof. Uesugi to use such informal words. It would however not work the other way around, as that would make Oda sound rude.

Of course Prof. Uesugi is nice enough to say good morning to his student, and after he says Oda, he uses the name affix "kun", which we know means "boy" (see Table 2). Let's carry on to the next bit of conversation.

Conversation 2: Saying hello to a colleague

In this short conversation, Prof. Uesugi runs into a former colleague at a party. Notice the difference in speech now that the conversation is between men of equal social class.

同輩: 久しぶりね, 上杉さん.

上杉さん: ええ, お元気ですか.

同輩: はい, 元気です. 御蔭様で. 貴方は.

上杉さん: 元気です.

Douhai: Hisashiburi ne, Uesugi-san.

Uesugi-san: Ee, ogenki desu ka?

Douhai: Hai, genki desu. Okagesamade. Anata wa?

Uesugi-san: Genki desu.

Colleague: Long time no see Mr.Uesugi.

Mr.Uesugi: Yes, have you been well?

Colleague: Yes fine thank you. And you?

Mr.Uesugi: I'm fine too.

Imagine approaching someone you haven't seen in a while. Your first sentence will probably be "Long time no see!" The Japanese have a special greeting for that too. However, instead of

literally saying “Long time no see”, they say “Hisashiburi ne”, which means “It has been a long time hasn’t it?” “Ne” is a particle which will be discussed in the grammar lessons. Just like in the first conversation, the name follows the greeting, which is then followed by the name affix. Since both men are teachers they will be considered as equal in social class. Therefore they can call each other “san”. If they were old friends, they would have addressed each other by their personal names instead of using “san”.

Out of politeness, Prof. Uesugi answers “Yes”. However instead of using the formal “Hai”, he used the informal “Ee”, since the two men are already acquainted. If you talk to someone you don’t know, it’s much more polite to use “hai” instead of “Ee”. During phone calls or interviews, “hai” is often used to let the person who is talking to you know that you are listening and that you’re interested in the story. Additionally, there are two forms of “no”, “iie” which is formal, and “iya” which is casual. Let’s recap with a table.

Table 3: Yes & No

はい	Hai	Yes (formal)
ええ	Ee	Yes (informal)
いいえ	iie	No (formal)
否	Iya	No (informal)

“Ogenki desu ka” is a commonly used phrase, it literally means “are you well?” and is preferred over “Ikaga desu ka” which means “how are you?” The “o” in “Ogenki” is an honorific “o”, which is used only when referring to someone else, and is used to portray respect. Long ago the Japanese referred to chopsticks as “Ohashi” instead of just “hashi”. Those rules have become more relaxed in modern Japanese. However some words and expressions still use this honorific “o”. This “o” can never be used when referring to oneself; it’s exclusively used for other people. If we break down this phrase, we have “ogenki” which means “well” or “healthy”, “desu” which is the copula “to be”, and “ka” which is a particle that makes the sentence a question (therefore the Japanese originally did not use the question mark in their written language, it was introduced much later by English speakers).

In his response, the colleague says “hai, genki desu”, which translates to “yes, I’m well”. In Japanese, the words “I” and “you” are usually understood and don’t have to be repeated in normal conversation. Therefore this sentence would say “Yes, well am” in the most literal way; however since the “I” part is understood there is no reason to add it. As you become more

proficient with Japanese you will learn when and when not to use “I” in a sentence. To show appreciation for the Prof. Uesugi’s concern, his colleague also adds “okagesamade”. This phrase and several others have no place in English grammar. Literally this means “thanks to you”, but that would sound really weird in English. Therefore we can safely translate this with a simple “thank you”. The real form of “thank you”, however, is very different, but we will cover that in the next lesson.

It is polite of course, to ask if the other person is well too. Instead of repeating the whole “ogenki desu ka”, Prof. Uesugi’s colleague simple says “anata wa”. “Anata” is the formal form of “you” and “wa” is a particle that indicates the subject. Although it’s not grammatically the same as “and you?” it is still used for that purpose. The next table summarizes the different versions of “you”.

Table 4: Forms of You

貴方	Anata	(formal)
君	Kimi	(affectionate, familiar)
お前	Omae	(familiar, rough, vulgar)
てめえ	Temee	(rough, vulgar)
きさま	Kisama	(insulting)

Just like before, there is no reason for Prof. Uesugi to give an extensive answer to his colleague's "anata wa". Therefore a simple "genki desu" will suffice. Now let's head for this lesson's final conversation.

Conversation 3: Asking a simple question

The following and also last conversation of this lesson is between Prof. Uesugi and a foreign exchange student called Karin. This conversation will show us how to ask for attention and how to make a general inquiry.

カリン: あのう, 済みません, 貴方は上杉さんですか.
上杉さん: はい. 貴方は.
カリン: カリンです, 始めまして. 上杉さんは英語が判りませか.
上杉さん: ええ, 少し. 貴方はアメリカ人ですか.
カリン: はい, アメリカ人です.

Karin: Anou, sumimasen, anata wa uesugi-san desu ka.
Uesugi-san: Hai. Anata wa.
Karin: Karin desu, hajimemashite. Uesugi-san wa eigo-ga wakarimasu ka.
Uesugi-san: Ee, sukoshi. Anata wa Amerika-jin desu ka?
Karin: Hai, Amerika-jin desu.

Karin: Um, excuse me, are you Mr.Uesugi?
Mr.Uesugi: Yes, and you are?
Karin: I'm Karin, nice to meet you. Do you understand English?
Mr.Uesugi: Yes, a little. Are you an American?
Karin: Yes, I'm American.

In this conversation, we meet Karin, a foreign exchange student who's touring her new campus and meeting new people. As she approaches Prof. Uesugi, she taps him on the shoulder and says "Anou, sumimasen". "Anou" is the Japanese equivalent of "Umm", "sumimasen" is a phrase you will hear quite often and means "excuse me". "Sumimasen" is used to attract attention to people you want to talk to, or it can be used as a less formal "I'm sorry". Her next sentence is another simple one, "anata wa Uesugi-san desu ka". If you followed and understood the last two conversations, this one should be easy. "Anata" means "you", "wa" indicated the topic, "Uesugi-san" is the topic, "desu" is the copula, and finally "ka" makes this sentence a question. So this sentence reads "are you Mr. Uesugi?" Mr. Uesugi confirms the question and says "Hai, anata wa", which we know means "yes, and you?"

Since Karin is new and has never met Prof. Uesugi, she replies with a new phrase, "hajimemashite". This means "nice to meet you for the first time". Since that would sound terribly awkward in English, we can just say "nice to meet you". Some teachers prefer to translate this to "How do you do?" however that would not make much sense, as "how do you do?" would

technically be "Ikaga desu ka". If you watch Japanese TV or if you've been to Japan, you will notice that "hajimemashite" is used only when people meet for the first time, therefore the translation of "how do you do?" would make no sense seeing as in English you would only say "nice to meet you" when you first meet someone, and "how do you do?" would be used whenever you see someone. Additionally we already learned that Japanese people prefer "Ogenki desu ka" when asking about someone's wellbeing.

Karin's next question is a little more complicated than the last. She asks, "Uesugi-san wa eigo-ga wakarimasu ka", which we translate as "Mr. Uesugi, do you understand English?" By now you should be familiar with the "wa" particle which indicates Mr. Uesugi as the topic. "Eigo" is a combination of two words, "ei" which means "England" and "go" which means "language", so we understand that "eigo" means "English language". "Ga" is another particle which in this case joins "eigo" with the verb "wakarimasu". The latter is known as a "masu" verb, we will discuss those verbs in detail in later lessons, for now; know that "wakarimasu" means "to understand". Like always, "ka" is what makes this sentence a question. To summarize, Karin said: "Uesugi-san wa", indicating that the topic is

Mr. Uesugi, "eigo-ga", "english", "wakarimasu ka", "understand?" As you can see, Japanese sentence structure is determined by its use of particles such as "wa", "ga" and "ka". As you get more familiar with Japanese grammar, you will be able to use particles in a lot of different ways.

Continuing with the conversation, Prof. Uesugi answers Karin's question by saying "Ee, sukoshi." We already know that "Ee" is the informal form of "yes" (see table 3). "Sukoshi" means "a little", so the Professor answers "Yes, a little." Karin's question is then redirected into a different one as the Professor asks "anata wa Amerika-jin desu ka". The only two new words in this sentence are "Amerika" and "jin", which are connected together. "Amerika" of course is the Japanese version of America, and is pronounced only slightly different. "Jin" is an affix that indicates that said person comes from the aforementioned place. "Amerika-jin" is therefore simply translated to "American", meaning an American citizen. The "jin" affix can be combined with any country, city or place name. So the Professor asks "Are you an American?" To confirm this, Karin replies, "Hai, amerika-jin desu", "Yes, I'm American." Again, the topic (Karin) is understood, so all she has to do is confirm the question.

As an end to this lesson we will have two tables with examples of the use of “go” and “jin”. On the last pages you will find a list of all the words used in this lesson, some additional grammar notes and the copyright information. Have fun with this lesson, be sure to practice, and see you next time!

Table 5: Languages

英語	Eigo	English
日本語	Nihongo	Japanese
中学語	Chuugakugo	Chinese
スペイン語	Supaingo	Spanish
フランス語	Furansugo	French

Table 6: People

イギリス人	Igirisu-jin	English person
日本人	Nihon-jin	Japanese person
中国人	Chuugaku-jin	Chinese person
スペイン人	Supain-jin	Spanish person
フランス人	Furansu-jin	French person

Vocabulary

<u>Japanese:</u>	<u>Romanized:</u>	<u>English</u>
お早うございます	Ohayou gozaimasu	Good morning
先生	Sensei	Prof. Md. (polite name affix)
ああ	Aa	Oh!
君	Kun	Boy, young master (name affix)
久しぶりね	Hisashiburi ne	Long time no see
さん	San	Mr. Mrs. (polite name affix)
ええ	Ee	Yes (informal)
お元気	O-genki	Well, healthy
です	Desu	To be (copula)
か	Ka	Particle (makes something a question)
お元気ですか	O-genki desu ka	Are you well?
はい	Hai	Yes (formal)
御蔭様で	Okagesamade	Thanks to you (English: thank you after Ogenki desu ka)
貴方	Anata	You (formal)
は	Wa	Particle (indicates topic)

あのう	Anou	Umm (attract attention)
済みません	Sumimasen	Excuse me (informal: I'm sorry)
はじめまして	Hajimemashite	Nice to meet you (for the first time)
英語	Eigo	English language
が	Ga	Particle (combines a verb to something else)
判りませ	Wakarimasu	Verb: To understand
少し	Sukoshi	A little
アメリカ人	Amerika-jin	American person

Additional Vocabulary

今日は	Kon'nichi wa	Good day
今晚は	Konban wa	Good evening
様	Sama	Polite Mr. or Mrs.
ちゃん	Chan	Girl (miss)
いいえ	lie	No (formal)
否	Iya	No (informal)
君	Kimi	You (affectionate, familiar)

お前	Omae	You (familiar, rough, vulgar)
てめえ	Temee	You (rough, vulgar)
きさま	Kisama	You (insulting)
日本語	Nihongo	Japanese
中学語	Chuugakugo	Chinese
スペイン語	Supaingo	Spanish
フランス語	Furansugo	French
イギリス人	Igirisu-jin	English person
日本人	Nihon-jin	Japanese person
中学人	Chuugaku-jin	Chinese person
スペイン人	Supain-jin	Spanish person
フランス人	Furansu-jin	French person

Grammar Notes

The "wa" used as a particle is actually "ha" in hiragana. However because of an odd occurrence in the Japanese language we use "ha" as the particle and pronounce it "wa". In words written in hiragana however, "ha" remains "ha" and "wa" is still "wa". This switch only occurs only with the particle "wa". When typing Japanese in a program that uses Romaji, remember to type "ha" for the particle "wa" becomes most programs do not check grammar.

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