



Tofugu's

**Top 10 Free Online
Japanese Resources**

by Koichi

<http://www.tofugu.com>

A QUICK INTRODUCTION



contact me: koichi@tofugu.com

So, if you're here, you probably want to learn some Japanese, which I think is great. The Japanese language has seen a huge surge in popularity, thanks to things like anime, manga, drama (and in my dreams, Godzilla). There are all sorts of resources out there, some good, some mediocre, and a lot really bad. I hope this little e-book will help you out a bit, and help you to enjoy Japanese!

So, here's the deal, though. I think that everyone who is just starting Japanese should find themselves a teacher. Whether that's a class, a private tutor, whatever. It's important to build good foundations so you can really accelerate your studies later on (and create good habits in the process). There are ways to do

this, and most of them cost a little bit of money. The best deal that I've found hasn't happened yet. It will be on eduFire, when they launch one-to-many classes, where up to 99 students will be able to join a teacher for a lecture / series of classes. I'll be teaching a couple of these for beginners, and I'll charge \$5 a class, because I think learning should be affordable.

So, there you have it. Enjoy the resources provided in this book. They are amazing. Every single one of them. Use them to supplement your studies, and you'll be a pro in no time at all!

Koichi is a graduate of Willamette University, where he majored in Japanese Studies. He started tofugu.com, and is dedicated to helping people learn Japanese!

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE TOFUGU STUFF?

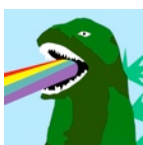


Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/tofugu>

Website: <http://www.tofugu.com>



Twitter:
<http://www.twitter.com/tofugu>



SPECIAL GODZILLA-FILLED THANKS:

Special thanks to <http://www.reedsinjapan.com> and <http://www.stshores24.com> for referring me to a couple of these Japanese learning resources. Even more special thanks to all of you who support Tofugu by enjoying it (or disliking it). We really appreciate each and every one of you!

Lang-8

<http://www.lang-8.com>



Ratings

The Social:	★★★★★
Fun Factor:	★★★★★
Effectiveness:	★★★★★
Reading:	★★★★☆
Writing:	★★★★★
Speaking:	★☆☆☆☆
Listening:	☆☆☆☆☆
Vocabulary:	★★★★☆
Grammar:	★★★★★

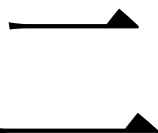
Lang-8 (pretend the 8 is sideways; it means “infinity”) is a website for all languages, but is especially good when it comes to practicing Japanese. The concept behind this site is that you, the user, writes journal entries in the language that you are learning (probably Japanese), and then people who are natives of that language will correct it for you. Then, theoretically, you could do the same for them, for the language that they are learning. It's a win-win for everyone.

WHY I LIKE LANG-8

There are other sites out there which provide a similar service, but when it comes to Japanese study, Lang-8 can't be beaten. Recently, it was featured on Hatena, a big Japanese social bookmarking website, which means there are a plethora of Japanese people using Lang-8 right now. This means there's a ton of people out there willing and able to help you out with your Japanese (and excited to get your help as well).

Besides this, I've only had great experiences with Lang-8's staff and users, who have been friendly and helpful at every turn I make. They make me want to come back to the website on a regular basis, which means I get to learn new things all the time.

A combination of Lang-8's usability, community, and effectiveness make Lang-8 a winner, especially if you need to focus on your writing / grammar. I highly recommend all Japanese language learners to check Lang-8 out!



Tae Kim's Guide to Japanese

<http://www.guidetojapanese.org>

Examples

(1) 私が友達にプレゼントをあげた。
- I gave present to friend.

(2) これは先生にあげる。
- I'll give this to teacher.

In order to express the giving of a favor (verb) you must ever use useful te-form and then attach 「あげる」. This applies to all the other sections in this lesson as well.

(1) 車を買ってあげるよ。
- I'll give you the favor of buying a car.

(2) 代わりに行ってあげる。
- I'll give you the favor of going in your place.

Tae Kim's Guide to Japanese is a not-for-profit page (.org) that has information on pretty much every beginner and intermediate grammar point you've ever come across. It is well organized, has a ton of examples, and even includes lesser-known alternatives to certain grammar points you'll go over. Perhaps one of the greatest features to Tae Kim's Guide to Japanese is that it's been translated into eleven other languages by fans of the site!

WHY I LIKE TAE KIM'S GUIDE TO JAPANESE

There aren't too many philanthropists out there who are willing to share this much knowledge without asking for some money in return. Tae Kim is one of those people, putting together this great guide to Japanese. Really, I usually suggest to people to get a textbook to get the full "learn Japanese" experience. Tae Kim is as close as you can get to a solid textbook experience without putting down some cold hard cash.

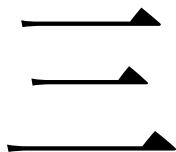
Whenever I have a question about a grammar point, I go straight to Tae Kim (and never do a Google search first). I know that I'll be able to find the answer to my question, get some examples on it, and feel good that it's reliable.

He also does a great blog (<http://www.guidetojapanese.org/blog/>), which I follow and read regularly.

Ratings

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Vocabulary:	★★★★★
Grammar:	★★★★★

Top Ten Free Online Resources for Learning Japanese



iKnow!

<http://www.iknow.co.jp>



When it comes to learning vocabulary, things can get monotonous sometimes. iKnow revolutionizes the way you learn vocabulary, using amazing flash cards, dictation practice, speed tests, podcasts, and a ton of free, pre-made lessons (so you don't have to go through the work of putting together your own). It then keeps track of your progress and tells you how much you should practice if you want to reach your goal. Think of it like Wii Fit for Japanese language.

WHY I LIKE IKNOW!

I've only been using it for about a week, but every time I finish practicing some vocab, I come away with a feeling of "Wow, that was fancy...and effective." I learn a lot more than I would with traditional flash cards, and better yet, I retain a lot more too.

Here's why iknow's flashcards are better. When you see a word come up, it asks you if you know the word. If you hit yes, it doesn't just go to the next card (you see, it knows that you are trying to lie to it).

Instead, it will give you 4-8 multiple choice answers, so this way, you have to prove you actually knew the word. If you knew it, it will keep track, if you don't, it will flag it and come back later for more practice.

Other features include "dictation" (where you type out what you hear), "brain speed" (where you hone your Japanese reflexes), "podcasts" (podcasts based on the lesson's you last did) and "flash cards."

To learn vocab, without a doubt, this is the place you want to be.

Ratings

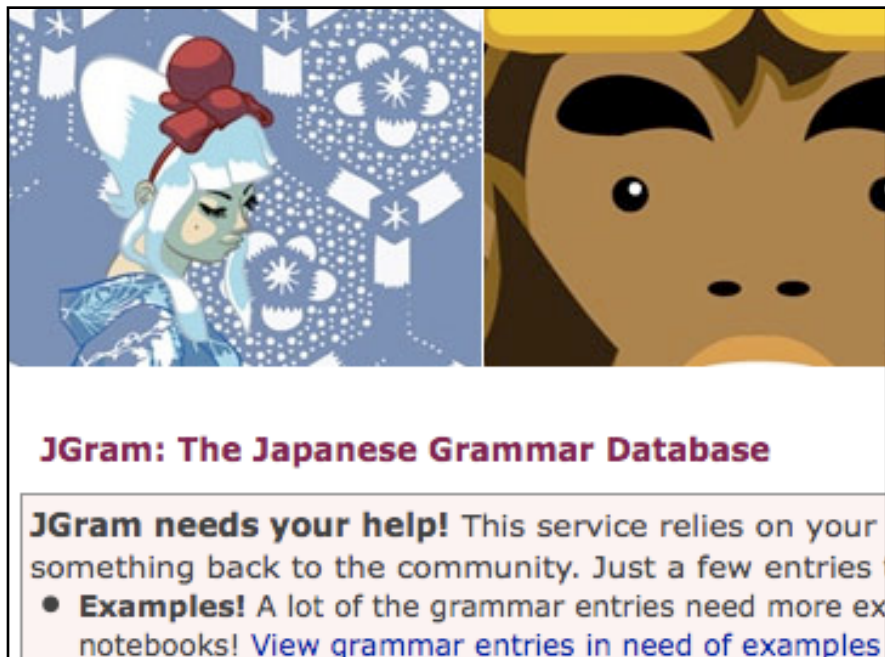
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Grammar:	★★★★☆

<http://www.tofugu.com>

四

jGram

<http://www.jgram.org>



jGram (short for “Japanese Grammar”) is a community project where anyone can share their Japanese knowledge, kind of like a wiki. To help with the reliability factor, jGram users have to check examples, and a point scale will tell you how many people have flagged it as reliable / correct. Although this website focuses on grammar, there are sections for useful phrases as well, which, not surprisingly, are very useful.

WHY I LIKE JGRAM

I love open source. It’s great when a large number of people come together and put together something great.

jGram, of course, is no exception. I love how they separate grammar out by JLPT level (the standardized test for people learning Japanese). When I was studying, I was on this site every day. Now that I’ve stopped studying for it, I enjoy the ability to add grammar to “my study list” so I can come back and know what I need to study later. I

can even pull up my study list onto a mobile device and it will be formatted for my cell phone. Now that’s awesome.

Lastly, I love the community aspect. There are always people adding examples (or taking down bad examples), making comments on the grammar point, and in general just giving the site a social feel to it. Although I wouldn’t suggest someone to use this as their soul guide for learning Japanese, it’s definitely great to have as a grammar resource.

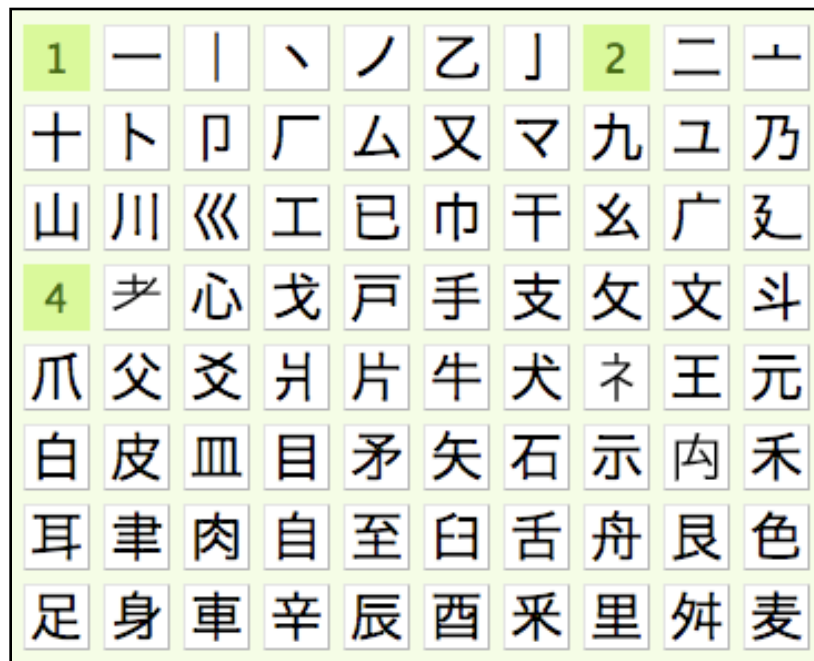
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Listening:	★☆☆☆☆
Vocabulary:	★★★★☆
Grammar:	★★★★★

五

Denshi Jisho

<http://www.jisho.org/>



It's hard to find a good dictionary. Now, there is Jim Breen's WWWJDIC (which I highly recommend), but I've come to like Denshi Jisho a little bit more. It takes all the data from Jim Breen, and then makes it pretty and much more useable. It has features like word lookup, kanji lookup, and even search by radical (which is ridiculously awesome), making it more useful than Jim Breen's original dictionary (though Jim Breen's translate feature still wins).

WHY I LIKE DENSHI JISHO

I've been a huge fan of Jim Breen ever since it came out. No other dictionary that I can find ever comes close to the level of detail that it has (sometimes too much information, really). I have always been upset at how ugly it is, and Denshi Jisho fixes this completely.

It does have some features which are a little bit different though. My favorite of them is the kanji radical lookup. If you have a kanji, and you have no idea what it is, you look it up by its radicals. This

feature allows you to click on a radical to narrow down your kanji search (at which point it will show you all the kanji that have that radical, as well as allow you to pick more radicals, if they are available). This makes it really easy to narrow down and figure out a kanji that you don't know. This is something I've been waiting for for a long time. I hate thumbing through my paper kanji dictionary. This changes *everything!*

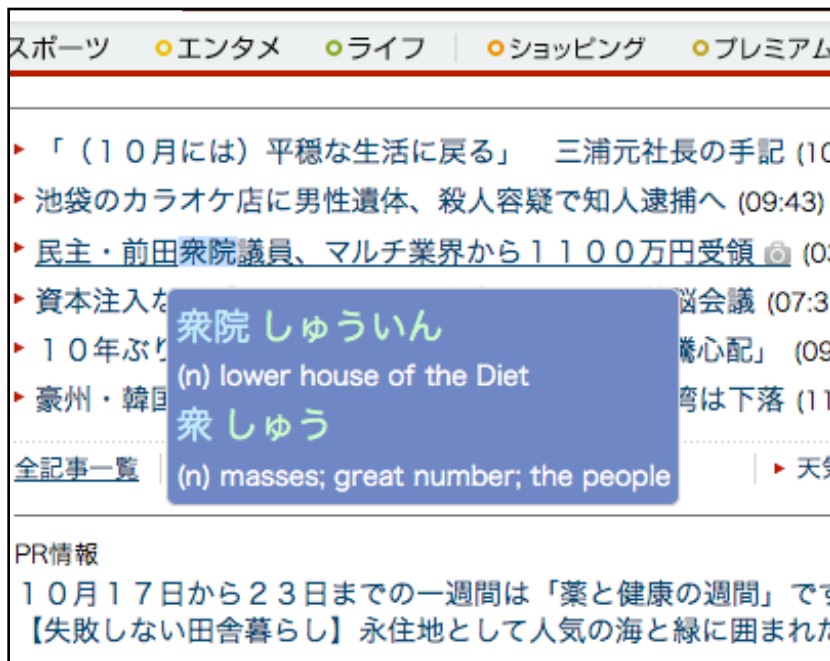
Ratings

The Social:	★☆☆☆☆
Fun Factor:	★★☆☆☆
Effectiveness:	★★★★★
Reading:	★★★★☆
Writing:	★★★★☆
Speaking:	★☆☆☆☆
Listening:	☆☆☆☆☆
Vocabulary:	★★★★★
Grammar:	★★★★☆

六

Rikaichan

<http://www.polarcloud.com/rikaichan/>



Rikaichan is a Firefox extension (get Firefox, foo'!) that allows you to hover over any kanji to get its kanji, hiragana reading, and English definition (see above example). All you do is hit the “activate Rikaichan button” to start it up, and then just turn it off when you’re done. You can download multiple dictionaries, including a name dictionary that recognizes when you’re hovering over someone’s name.

WHY I LIKE RIKAICHAN

I don’t know how many times I’ve navigated a Japanese page, unsure what parts of it say. With Rikaichan, I can hit words I don’t know and get their definitions quickly and easily, without having to copy and paste them into a dictionary. Although I’m not retaining a lot on the way, it does allow me to read content more quickly and efficiently, if that’s what I want to do.

Another thing I do with Rikaichan is read emails. I get my email through Apple Mail, which

means it’s not on my Firefox browser (and thus not accessible by Rikaichan). I like to copy and paste emails in Japanese into Google Docs, then use Rikaichan to hit the hard words.

If you’re practicing reading Japanese, Rikaichan is a must if you want to navigate the Japanese web. I mean, how else are you going to see what’s going on in 2chan?

Ratings

The Social:	☆☆☆☆☆
Fun Factor:	★★☆☆☆
Effectiveness:	★★★★★
Reading:	★★☆☆☆
Writing:	★★★★☆
Speaking:	★★☆☆☆
Listening:	★★☆☆☆
Vocabulary:	★★★★★
Grammar:	★★★★☆

七

Podcasts on iTunes

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>



Although you can't download Japanese music (without snatching yourself a Japanese iTunes gift card), you can download and subscribe to podcasts for free. Just get on iTunes, get a (free) account, and go down to the bottom of the application and choose Japan as your location. From there, click on "podcasts," then have at it. There are all sorts of categories available, and you can even choose a children's podcast if you are a beginner in Japanese!

WHY I LIKE ITUNES

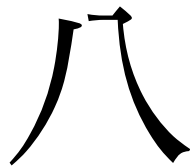
Now, it's not so much that I like iTunes, but I really do like the way they organize podcasts, and make it easy to find whatever you want (and then keep getting new episodes automatically). I just listen to Japanese podcasts in the background while I'm doing other things, and it's a good way to keep my mind thinking Japanese whenever I have a free moment. It doesn't even really matter if you speak much Japanese - it's good to hear people talk, and even if you aren't actively learning anything, you're

hearing the sounds that make up the Japanese language, which is great.

If you *do* speak some Japanese, then you'll be able to enjoy the podcasts a little more, which is even better! I subscribe to a lot of comedy shows, and enjoy listening to them. I have a good twenty subscriptions right now, so I always have something to listen to (that is, when I'm not listening to Car Talk on NPR)

Ratings

The Social:	★☆☆☆☆
Fun Factor:	★★★★★
Effectiveness:	★★★★☆
Reading:	★☆☆☆☆
Writing:	☆☆☆☆☆
Speaking:	★★☆☆☆
Listening:	★★★★★
Vocabulary:	★★★★☆
Grammar:	★★★★☆



Yamasa Kanji Stroke Order

<http://www.yamasa.cc/members/ocjs/kanjidic.nsf/...>

Kanji: 豆 Radical: 豆 (まめ)

On reading: トウ、ズ
Kun reading: まめ
English meaning: bean
Joyo grade: 3
Stroke count: 7

Ratings

The Social:	☆☆☆☆☆
Fun Factor:	★☆☆☆☆
Effectiveness:	★★★★☆
Reading:	★★★★★
Writing:	★★★★★
Speaking:	★☆☆☆☆
Listening:	☆☆☆☆☆
Vocabulary:	★★★★☆
Grammar:	★☆☆☆☆

Yamasa's Online dictionary is just another Japanese dictionary, but it does have one feature that really makes it stand out, and that is the ability to see the stroke order of any kanji you type in (link to this feature provided above). Although stroke order is pretty easy for a veteran of Japanese, beginners will find this webpage very helpful. Start those good habits early!

WHY I LIKE YAMASA'S STROKE ORDER

I don't know how many times I've been asked about stroke order when it comes to kanji. Now, I just refer them to this webpage. I can't stress enough how important it is to write with the correct stroke order. It helps give you nice handwriting, creates good habits, and make you a better all-around Japanese student.

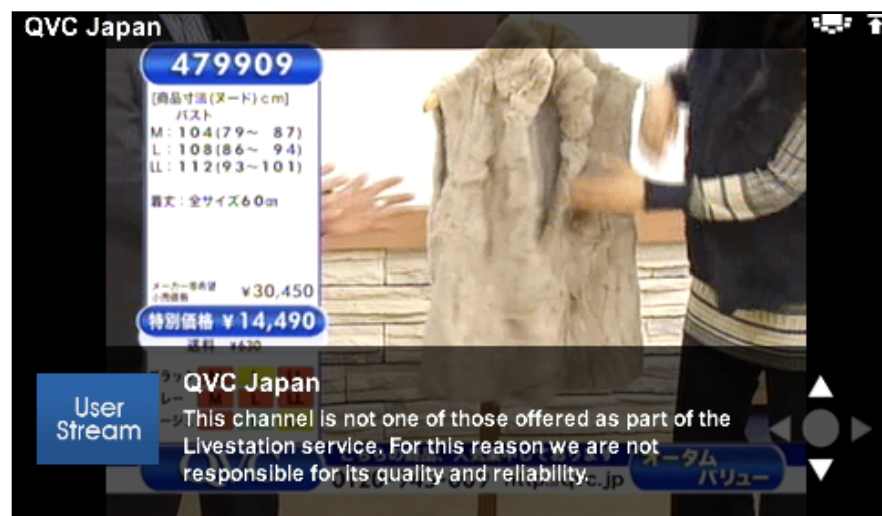
Although I'm not a fan of this particular type of study myself, it will also show you the "on" and "kun" reading of a kanji, which may be very useful for those

who have a very "technical" way of learning. This site isn't the most beautiful site in the world, but they do a good job at stroke order, so I highly recommend it!

九

LiveStation Online TV

<http://www.livestation.com/>



Livestation is a program that you can use on Windows, MacOSX, or even Linux, that allows you to watch television from all over the world, for free, and it might even be legal (maybe?). There are all sorts of programs, but of course, you can find the ones from Japan, and save them to your favorites list, just like I did! The Japanese Home Shopping Network is playing in my background as I write this.

WHY I LIKE LIVESTATION

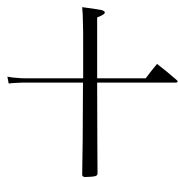
First of all, it can be used by Windows, Mac, and Linux users (yay, don't have to boot into Windows just to watch Japanese television). Secondly, being able to watch Japanese television from anywhere in the world is plain awesome. Sadly, most of the programs I watch are during weird times (in Japan, anyways), but I still get to enjoy it most of the time. I actually find myself on the home shopping channel a lot (it's strangely fascinating).

Do yourself a favor and download this program. I Definitely wouldn't recommend someone using this to actually try and learn Japanese, but all levels can at least enjoy it, and advanced learners can actually utilize it in a way that's effective for language learning.

Me? I just like the commercials.

Ratings

The Social:	★★★★☆☆
Fun Factor:	★★★★★★
Effectiveness:	★★★★☆☆
Reading:	★☆☆☆☆
Writing:	☆☆☆☆☆
Speaking:	★★★★☆☆
Listening:	★★★★★★
Vocabulary:	★★★★☆☆
Grammar:	★★★★☆☆



Twitter

<http://www.twitter.com>



Twitter is only getting more and more popular. It's actually catching on in Japan quite a bit too, which can mean some "micro-Japanese-practice" for you. Twitter allows you to write up to 140 characters, telling the world (and your followers) what you're doing right now. If done diligently, this can be a great tool for learning Japanese. Just follow Japanese Twitter users, read their short posts, and then update your own page in Japanese as well.

WHY I LIKE TWITTER

Twitter is fun and easy to do, which is why I like it. That means, it's *easy* to translate something someone wrote (use Rikaichan) and it's *easy* to write a 140 or less tweet in Japanese about what you're doing. There's nothing long, hard, difficult, or time consuming about it, but you're still able to do some practice, and hopefully have a little fun at the same time.

Another thing I've seen done is people writing new words they've learned, with the kanji and the

definition. This helps you, and it helps others who might decide to follow you. It's just another way to reinforce what you already know (or don't know), and Twitter makes it fun and easy.

Oh, and if you want, you can follow me too. My Twitter username is "Tofugu."

Ratings

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Reading:	★★★★☆
Writing:	★★★★☆
Speaking:	☆☆☆☆☆
Listening:	☆☆☆☆☆
Vocabulary:	★★★★☆
Grammar:	★★☆☆☆

Thanks for Reading!

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(If you want to help, just send this to your friends, classmates, and teachers. Tweet it, blog it, and share it! Thank you so much!)