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Tips and Tricks for Japanese and Kanji beginners. by Heather Protz

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When you're a Japanese student, learning Kanji will be strenuous. Well, don't give up on Japanese yet. Kids in Japan take 12 long years to memorize all the scripts before they become adept at reading a newspaper. To master Kanji you need plenty of practice in both reading and writing.

As a Japanese student, I faced plenty of difficulties while learning the script initially. I had to work really hard to get the stroke order right, Japanese teachers are able to find out the mistakes in the stroke order just by the ink marks. The Japanese are meticulous creatures and are very particular when it comes to getting their letters right. In any case, the stroke order is extremely important because it lessens the burden of writing and memorizing complicated Kanjis. Then I struggled with the uses of the kanji. I was muffled, never knew that a single letter or more precisely an ideogram could hold so many different meanings. Then came the overwhelming number of Kanjis.

How many are there? There are over 10000 Kanjis in the Japanese language and if you are a complete beginner with absolutely no clue about Japanese, please give up on the idea of learning Kanji, for now. It could be, no, it will be impossible. There are very few people in the world who have memorized more than 10000 Kanjis and that's including the Chinese. Kanji usage in Japan has been restricted to 2000 with about 1350 Kanjis being taught to students (even to the native Japanese). This number should get you comfortable in Japan. If you're a Japanese beginner keen on reading mangas, it's not going to happen now. Not until Naruto gets its grand finale anyway. It will take that long. Why? Well, because Japanese is not just Kanji.

Japanese writing system uses three different scripts. Yes, three. That means you'll have to learn entirely new sets of alphabets for these three scripts. First is the Hiragana, this script was borrowed from the Chinese and was used way back in the 5th century. Originally, this script was used by the women as in ancient Japan, women weren't allowed education. Now, Hiragana is extensively used by the Japanese. Hiragana is especially useful for writing words that have no Kanji.

Next up is the Katakana. This script was used even before the 5th century and usually along with the Kanji in official letters and telegrams. Now Katakana usage is restricted to the words that have been borrowed from other languages or scientific terms and phrases etc. Katakana is also used to indicate words that represent sounds, for example the ringing of a phone etc. Many Japanese writers also use Katakana for emphasis on certain words.

Hiragana has a total of 48 characters with 39 consonant-vowel unions, 5 vowels, 1 consonant sound and 2 obsolete vowel sounding consonants that are now used as particle pointers. Katakana on the other hand has 51 characters. It follows the same pattern as Hiragana, the difference being in the way the characters are written rather than the way they are read. Katakana has 6 more consonant-vowel combinations than Hiragana.

The first and foremost tip to learn Kanji is to get thorough with the Hiragana and the Katakana. You can't learn Kanji without the aid of these two. Once you're done with these two, and before you proceed to Kanji, buy a checkered notebook for practice. This way you can practice the Kanji exactly the way it is. Make sure that the Kanji you write are proportionate and that they don't extend out of the checkers. Always get your stroke order right. It is extremely important that the stroke orders for any Kanji follows the same as in the textbook. There are plenty of rules for easily memorizing the stroke orders, but don't always stick to them, there are more exceptions than rules in Kanji. One difficulty any beginner comes across in learning Kanji is the usage of the Kanji. Unlike Hiragana or Katakana, the characters in Kanji hold meanings in itself. Don't panic, it happens and

you can get this right only through years of practice. But always remember to remember practicing Kanji-it's tough to learn and easy to forget.

Aside that, take help from Japanese tutorials online. There a huge number of websites that offer free Japanese lessons. Once you've learnt a minimum of 500 Kanji, start reading manga or Japanese literature. Another easy way of practicing Kanji is to watch them scroll on Japanese news channels. This way you'll get to practice the language both ways. Fortunately, there are Japanese channels being broadcast in the US by cable providers and dishTV is offering some great deals like the Dish TV Offers, to save money on your home entertainment.

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Heather is an otaku who watches anime on her Dish TV and she loves learning about the Japanese culture. She is also interested in sourcing out some great deals like thea Dish TV Offers

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