

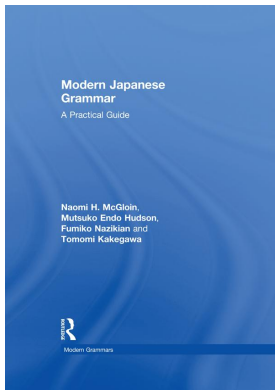
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## **Modern Japanese Grammar A Practical Guide**

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### **Numbers and classifiers**

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# 16

## Numbers and classifiers

### 16.1

#### General remarks about numbers and classifiers

There are two number series in Japanese, those of native (J) origin and those of Chinese (C) origin. The native numbers go only from 1 to 10 (and then skip to 20 in some cases). Interestingly, the multiples in this series start with the same consonant; 1 and 2 with ‘h,’ 3 and 6 with ‘m,’ and 4 and 8 with ‘y.’

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
J	hi	fu	mi	yo	itsu	mu	nana	ya	kokono	too
C	ichi	ni	san	shi	go	roku	shichi	hachi	ku/kyuu	juu

Although the native numbers have limited usage, one of the most common is to express the ages 1 to 10 and 20; e.g. **hito-tsu** ‘1 year old,’ **too** ‘10 years old,’ **hatachi** ‘20 years old.’ The suffix **-tsu** attached to the numbers here is a classifier for age, as well as for counting, in general. Other categories that use native numbers include **hito-ri** ‘one person,’ **futa-tabi** ‘two times, again,’ **yo-tsubu** ‘four grains, pills.’ They also appear as part of set phrases; e.g. **hito-kasegi suru** ‘to earn money,’ **hito-hada nugu** ‘to do a favor (Lit. ‘to take off one layer of skin),’ and **hito-kawa mukeru** ‘to change’ (Lit. ‘to peel one layer of skin’).

There are three ways to say ‘zero’: **ree**, borrowed from Chinese, **zero** from English, and a native word meaning ‘circle,’ **maru**. Room number 306, for example, may be pronounced **san ree roku**, **san zero roku**, or **san maru roku**. When a sequence of numbers is given, such as telephone, house, and room numbers and postal code, the Chinese series is used, in which case, the vowel in a one-syllable word is lengthened; **ni** ‘2’ → **nii**, **shi** ‘4’ → **shii**, **go** ‘5’ → **goo**. In the Chinese series, bad luck numbers are 4 and 9, and they are sometimes avoided. This is because there are homophones (words with same pronunciation) with unlucky meanings. **Shi** can mean ‘4’ or ‘death,’ and **ku** can mean ‘9’ or ‘suffering.’

As a default, Chinese series numbers appear with ‘classifiers’ (see **16.2**) of Chinese origin, and native numbers with native classifiers. The series are sometimes mixed, however. To tell the time, for example, Chinese origin words are used with **ji** ‘o’clock’; e.g. **ichi-ji** ‘one o’clock.’ For ‘four o’clock,’ however, the native word **yo** ‘four’ is used, as in **yo-ji**, instead of **shi**. This is probably because the non-existent **shi-ji** sounds too similar to **shichi-ji** ‘seven o’clock.’ Likewise, many people nowadays say **nana-ji** to mean ‘seven o’clock’ instead of the normal **shichi-ji**, especially on the telephone and in business conversations so as not to be confused with **ichi-ji** ‘one o’clock.’

#### ▶ 36.1

Numbers from both series are used in naming and counting the days of the month, the forms for which are identical; e.g. **futsu-ka** can mean either ‘the second day’ or ‘two days.’ **Tsui-tachi** ‘the first day’ is an exception. It is derived from **tsuki** ‘month’ + **tachi** ‘stand, start’ by loss of the ‘k’. ‘One day’ is expressed as **ichi-nichi**, with the Chinese series number **ichi** ‘one,’ followed by **nichi** ‘day,’ a classifier of Chinese origin. **Ka** ‘day’ is a classifier of Japanese origin, and it is used with

Japanese series numbers. For the second through the tenth, fourteenth, twentieth, and twenty-fourth day, the numbers and the classifier **-ka** is used, and number + **nichi** is used for the rest.

1: <b>tsui-tachi</b> ‘first day,’ <b>ichi-nichi</b> ‘one day’;		
2: <b>futsu-ka</b>	3: <b>mik-ka</b>	4: <b>yok-ka</b>
5: <b>itsu-ka</b>	6: <b>mui-ka</b>	7: <b>nano-ka</b>
8: <b>yoo-ka</b>	9: <b>kokono-ka</b>	10: <b>too-ka</b>
11: <b>juu-ichi-nichi</b>	12: <b>juu-ni-nichi</b>	13: <b>juu-san-nichi</b>
14: <b>juu-yok-ka</b>	15: <b>juu-go-nichi</b> . . .	
20: <b>hatsu-ka</b>	21: <b>ni-juu-ichi-nichi</b>	22: <b>ni-juu-ni-nichi</b> . . .
23: <b>ni-juu-san-nichi</b>	24: <b>ni-juu-yok-ka</b>	25: <b>ni-juu-go-nichi</b> . . .
29: <b>ni-juu-ku-nichi</b>	30: <b>san-juu-nichi</b> . . .	

► 36.2

### Numbers 11 to 99

For numbers above 10, the Chinese series is used. The word for ‘11’ is **juu ichi**, from **juu** ‘10’ and **ichi** ‘1,’ ‘12’ is **juu ni**, from **juu** ‘10’ and **ni** ‘2,’ and so on. The multiples of 10 are formed as **ni** ‘2’ **juu** ‘10’ for ‘20,’ **san** ‘3’ **juu** ‘10’ for ‘30,’ etc. ‘98’ is pronounced **kyuu** ‘9’ **juu** ‘10’ **hachi** ‘8.’

11: <b>juu ichi</b>	21: <b>ni juu ichi</b>	40: <b>yon/shi juu</b>
12: <b>juu ni</b>	22: <b>ni juu ni</b>	50: <b>go juu</b>
13: <b>juu san</b>	23: <b>ni juu san</b>	60: <b>roku juu</b>
14: <b>juu shi/yon</b>	24: <b>ni juu shi/yon</b>	70: <b>nana juu</b>
15: <b>juu go</b>	25: <b>ni juu go</b>	80: <b>hachi juu</b>
16: <b>juu roku</b>	26: <b>ni juu roku</b>	90: <b>kyuu juu</b>
17: <b>juu shichi/nana</b>	27: <b>ni juu shichi/nana</b>	
18: <b>juu hachi</b>	28: <b>ni juu hachi</b>	
19: <b>juu ku/kyuu</b>	29: <b>ni juu ku/kyuu</b>	
20: <b>ni juu</b>	30: <b>san juu</b>	

### Numbers 100 and up

The word for ‘hundred’ is **hyaku**. The initial consonant ‘h’ changes to ‘b’ following **san** ‘three’ and **nan** ‘what,’ yielding **san byaku** ‘300’ and **nan byaku** ‘how many hundreds.’ The initial ‘h’ changes to ‘p’ with **roku** ‘six’ and **hachi** ‘eight,’ and the numbers are respectively pronounced **rop** and **hap**, yielding **rop pyaku** ‘600’ and **hap pyaku** ‘800.’

100: <b>hyaku</b>	200: <b>ni hyaku</b>	300: <b>san byaku</b>
400: <b>yon hyaku</b>	500: <b>go hyaku</b>	600: <b>rop pyaku</b>
700: <b>nana hyaku</b>	800: <b>hap pyaku</b>	900: <b>kyuu hyaku</b>

Three-digit numbers are expressed as the combination of hundreds, tens, and ones. For example, ‘368’ consists of **san byaku** ‘300,’ **roku juu** ‘60’ and **hachi** ‘8,’ and is pronounced as **san byaku roku juu hachi**.

The word for ‘thousand’ is **sen**. The initial consonant ‘s’ changes to ‘z’ following **san** ‘three’ and **nan** ‘what,’ yielding **san zen** ‘3000’ and **nan zen** ‘how many thousands.’

1,000: <b>(is) sen</b>	2,000: <b>ni sen</b>	3,000: <b>san zen</b>
4,000: <b>yon sen</b>	5,000: <b>go sen</b>	6,000: <b>roku sen</b>
7,000: <b>nana sen</b>	8,000: <b>has sen</b>	9,000: <b>kyuu sen</b>

The word for ‘ten thousand’ is **(ichi) man**, with a new unit name. There is no such word as **\*juu sen**, a literal translation of ‘ten thousand.’

10,000: <b>ichi man</b>	20,000: <b>ni man</b>	30,000: <b>san man</b>
40,000: <b>yon man</b>	50,000: <b>go man</b>	60,000: <b>roku man</b>
70,000: <b>nana man</b>	80,000: <b>hachi man</b>	90,000: <b>kyuu man</b>

The unit name changes by each digit up to **ichi man** ‘10,000.’ Then it changes when the digit increases by four, or at every four zeros.

## Types and meanings of classifiers

1	<b>ichi</b>	10,000,000	(is)sen man
10	<b>juu</b>	100,000,000	ichi oku
100	<b>hyaku</b>	1,000,000,000	juu oku
1,000	<b>sen or is sen</b>	10,000,000,000	hyaku oku
10,000	<b>ichi man</b>	100,000,000,000	sen oku
100,000	<b>juu man</b>	1,000,000,000,000	it choo
1,000,000	<b>hyaku man</b>		

'0' in a numerical sequence is not pronounced.

205:	<b>ni hyaku go</b>
40,301:	<b>yon man san byaku ichi</b>
6,089,030:	<b>rop pyaku hachi man kyuu sen san juu</b>

## Numbers with a decimal point

A decimal point is pronounced as **ten** 'point,' and the number after it is read as a sequence of single digit numbers. The numbers to the left of the decimal point are pronounced as explained in 16.1. Zero (0) is pronounced as **ree** or **zero** when it is the only number to the left of the decimal point.

0.5:	<b>ree ten go</b>	0.14:	<b>ree ten ichi yon</b>
9.72:	<b>kyuu ten nana ni</b>	40.863:	<b>yon jut ten hachi roku san</b>

Unlike in spoken English, in which zero is often omitted and '0.5' is pronounced simply as 'point five', Japanese does not omit 0 in either speech or writing.

## Fractions

When reading fractions, the whole is pronounced first, followed by the part.

1/2:	<b>ni bun no ichi</b>	half
2/3:	<b>san bun no ni</b>	two thirds
3/4:	<b>yon bun no san</b>	three quarters

## 16.2 Types and meanings of classifiers

In Japanese, a quantity is expressed by a number followed by a classifier (also called counter). Classifiers are not used with adverbs that express quantities (e.g. **subete** 'all,' **hotondo** 'almost all'). In English a classifier is used when describing the quantity of items classified as mass nouns (nouns that are not countable); e.g. 'three grains of rice,' 'two loaves of bread,' 'four sheets of paper.' In Japanese, classifiers are used when talking about both things that can and cannot be counted. The choice of classifier depends on the class of noun.

<i>Class of noun</i>	<i>Classifier</i>	<i>Number + Classifier</i>	
people (men, women, children, teachers)	<b>ri/nin:</b>	<b>hito ri</b>	one
		<b>futa ri</b>	two
		<b>san nin</b>	three
small animals and insects (frogs, mice, flies, dogs, cats)	<b>hiki:</b>	<b>ip piki</b>	one
		<b>ni hiki</b>	two
		<b>san biki</b>	three
large animals (horses, cows, bears, lions)	<b>too</b>	<b>it too</b>	one
		<b>ni too</b>	two
		<b>san too</b>	three
thin flat objects (paper, plates, shirts, sliced ham)	<b>mai</b>	<b>ichi mai</b>	one
		<b>ni mai</b>	two
		<b>san mai</b>	three
long and narrow objects (pens, umbrellas, fingers, trees, films)	<b>hon</b>	<b>ip pon</b>	one
		<b>ni hon</b>	two
		<b>san bon</b>	three

<i>Class of noun</i>	<i>Classifier</i>	<i>Number + Classifier</i>
large machines and vehicles (cars, bicycles, copy machines)	<b>dai</b>	<b>ichi dai</b> one <b>ni dai</b> two <b>san dai</b> three
bound objects (books, dictionaries, photo albums)	<b>satsu</b>	<b>is satsu</b> one <b>ni satsu</b> two <b>san satsu</b> three
things measured by spoons, cups, glasses, buckets	<b>hai</b>	<b>ip pai</b> one <b>ni hai</b> two <b>san bai</b> three
chunky or round objects, things in general (candies, apples, boxes, balls)	<b>ko</b>	<b>ik ko</b> one <b>ni ko</b> two <b>san ko</b> three
chunky or round objects, intangible things and concepts (apples, problems, hopes, recipes)	<b>tsu</b>	<b>hito tsu</b> one <b>futa tsu</b> two <b>mit tsu</b> three

When classifiers are attached, the pronunciation of some numbers and/or classifiers changes, e.g. **ichi + hon** → **ip pon** ‘one long object,’ **ichi + satsu** → **is satsu** ‘one bound object,’ **san + hiki** → **san biki** ‘three small animals.’

The most general classifier of Japanese origin is **tsu**, used with native numbers. It is particularly appropriate when counting small, round or chunky objects (e.g. apples, cups), but it can be used with almost any object in place of a specific classifier when speaking informally. Television, chairs, and dressers, for example, are supposed to be counted with specially designated classifiers, but **tsu** is commonly used instead. **Tsu** is also used referring to orders at restaurants and coffee shops; e.g. **tempura mit-tsu** ‘three tempuras,’ **koohii hito-tsu** ‘one coffee.’

When the number is larger than nine, things that are normally counted with **tsu** appear without a classifier; e.g. **Kanji o hyaku oboeta** ‘I learned 100 **kanji**.’ It is possible to switch to **-ko** in this and many other cases; e.g. **Kanji o hyak-ko oboeta** ‘I learned 100 **kanji**.’ Ages 9 and under can be counted with **tsu**; e.g. **kokono-tsu** ‘9 years old.’ Over 9, ages can be given without any classifier or with **sai** ‘year(s) old’; e.g. **too** or **jus-sai** ‘10 years old,’ **san-juu-ichi** or **san-juu-is-sai** ‘31 years old.’ (**-Sai** can be used with any age, from one year old.)

### Other groups of classifiers

#### Units of measurement

<b>miri meetoru</b>	millimeter
<b>senchi</b>	centimeter
<b>meetoru</b>	meter
<b>guramu</b>	gram
<b>kiro</b>	kilogram/kilometer
<b>miri rittoru</b>	milliliter
<b>rittoru</b>	liter

#### Duration

<b>byoo</b>	second
<b>fun</b>	minute
<b>jikan</b>	hour
<b>nichi (kan)</b>	day
<b>shuukan</b>	week
<b>ka getsu</b>	month
<b>nen (kan)</b>	year
<b>seeki</b>	century

## Frequency

<b>do</b>	times
<b>kai</b>	times

## Currency

<b>en</b>	Japanese yen
<b>doru</b>	dollar
<b>sentō</b>	cent
<b>yuuro</b>	euro
<b>pondo</b>	pound (sterling)

There is a classifier **sen** to express amounts less than **ichi en** ‘one yen,’ used for currency exchange rates and stock prices. 100 **sen** is equivalent to **ichi en** ‘one yen.’

Different classifiers may be used with the same noun.

ご飯が一粒残った。

**Gohan ga hito tsubu nokotta.**

One grain of rice remained.

ご飯を一杯食べた。

**Gohan o ippai tabeta.**

I ate a bowl of rice.

ご飯を一キロ使った。

**Gohan o ichi kiro tsukatta.**

I used one kilogram of rice.

## 16.3

## Position of numbers and classifiers

The number always precedes the classifier. Although the position of the number + classifier combination in a sentence depends on various factors, the canonical position is after the noun it modifies. The case particle is attached to the noun and the number + classifier chunk follows it. Case particles are not usually attached to the number + classifier phrase indicating an amount.

本を3冊買った。

**Hon o san satsu katta.**

I bought three books.

子供が2人遊んでいる。

**Kodomo ga futari asonde iru.**

Two children are playing.

姉が一人と弟が二人いる。

**Ane ga hitori to ototoo ga futari iru.**

I have one older sister and two younger brothers.

A quantifier marked with **no** (pre-nominal form of the copula) can appear before the associated noun.

三匹の子ぶた

**san biki no kobuta**

three little pigs

狼と7匹の子やぎ

**ookami to nana hiki no koyagi**

a wolf and seven kid goats

一杯のかけそば

**ip pai no kakesoba**

one bowl of soba noodles

The [number + classifier **no** N] sequence is appropriate when the quantified objects, people, etc. have particular significance to the narrative and are treated as a group. It is often used in the titles of stories or written materials. Such a sequence can be connected to another with **to** ‘and.’

花瓶に5本のバラと3本のガーベラを一緒に飾った。

**Kabin ni go hon no bara to san bon no gaabera o isshoni kazatta.**

I arranged five roses and three gerberas together in the vase.

The quantifier can also be placed before the noun it quantifies without adding **no**. Such a move has the effect of emphasizing the number + classifier phrase or making the sentence sound not well planned. The [number + classifier + N] sequence cannot be connected to another sequence of the same type. Thus, one cannot say \***Ni hon enpitsu to san satsu hon o katta** to mean ‘I bought two pencils and three books.’

スーパーで二個りんごを買った。

**Suupaa de ni ko ringo o katta.**

I bought two apples at a supermarket.

When the number + classifier phrase quantifies a noun marked by a postposition such as **to** ‘with,’ **ni** ‘for,’ and **kara** ‘from,’ the phrase is placed between the noun and the postposition.

友達二人と出かけた。

**Tomodachi futari to dekaketa.**

I went out with two friends.

先生三人から推薦状をもらった。

**Sensee san nin kara suisenjoo o moratta.**

I received letters of recommendation from three teachers.