

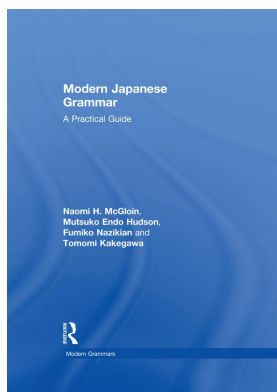
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## **Modern Japanese Grammar A Practical Guide**

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### **Questions**

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# Giving and seeking information



## Asking and responding to a yes or no question

熱があるんですか。

**Netsu ga aru n desu ka.**

Is it that you have a fever?

While the speaker asks a regular yes or no question **Netsu ga arimasu ka** when he/she does not know whether the hearer has a fever or not, the speaker will say **Netsu ga aru n desu ka** when he/she suspects that the hearer might have a fever (by looking at the hearer's flushed face, etc.).

## ▶ 18.2.2

## 32.1.3 Responding to yes or no questions

## 32.1.3.1 Affirmative responses

In responding to a yes or no question affirmatively, one can simply say **hai**, **ee**, or **un**, all meaning 'Yes.' One can also repeat a verb or an adjective, but generally other noun phrases are not repeated.

きのうパーティーに行きましたか。(F)

**Kinoo paatii ni ikimashita ka.**

Did you go to the party yesterday?

はい。

**Hai.**

はい、行きました。

**Hai, ikimashita.**

Yes, I did.

きのうパーティーに行った？(I)

**Kinoo paatii ni itta?**

Did you go to the party yesterday?

うん。

**Un.**

うん、行った(よ)。

**Un, itta (yo).**

Yeah, I did.

## 32.1.3.2 Negative responses

One can respond to a yes or no question negatively by saying **iie**, **ie**, **iya**, **uun**, all meaning 'No.' A possible answer to **Paatii ni ikimashita ka** is:

きのうパーティーに行きましたか。(F)

いいえ。

**Iie.**

いいえ、行きませんでした。

**Iie, ikimasen deshita.**

No, I did not go.

きのうパーティーに行った？(I)

ううん。

**Uun.**

いや、行かなかった。

**Iya, ikanakatta.**

No, I didn't.

Sometimes, using an adverb without the verb or adjective is sufficient.

Q: おもしろいですか。

**Omoshiroi desu ka.**

Is it interesting?

A: いいえ、別に。/ いいえ、ぜんぜん。

**Iie, betsuni. / Iie, zenzen.**

No, not particularly. / No, not at all.

Adverbs such as **betsuni** or **zenzen** indicate that the negative form follows, so it is not necessary to repeat the predicate.

## ▶ 14.3; 15.4

When the question is in the form of N + copula, **Soo desu** 'it is so' is more natural than repeating N + copula.

Q: 日本人ですか。(F)

**Nihonjin desu ka.**

Are you Japanese?

日本人？(I)

**Nihonjin?**

Are you Japanese?

- A: はい、そうです。                      うん、そう。  
**Hai, soo desu.**                      **Un, soo.**  
 Yes, that is right.                      Yeah, that's right.

In answering a **no desu ka** question, it is generally better not to repeat the same words in the question. Simply saying yes or no, using a sentential pronominal word **soo**, or adding further explanation or clarification is appropriate.

- Q: 熱があるんですか。  
**Netsu ga aru n desu ka.**  
 Is it that you have a fever?
- A(1): ええ、そうなんです。  
**Ee, soo na n desu.**  
 Yes, that's right.
- A(2): ええ、今朝からちょっと寒気がして...  
**Ee, kesa kara chotto samuke ga shite...**  
 Yes, I have been feeling a bit of a chill since this morning...

## 32.2 Questions asking for specific content information

Questions seeking 'who,' 'what,' 'where,' 'why,' etc. (WH-questions) are formed by placing interrogative words in appropriate positions in a sentence and adding **ka** at the end of the sentence. In informal style, a rising intonation without **ka** indicates that it is a question. WH-questions, moreover, typically appear in the **n(o) desu** construction.

### ▶ 4.3; 18.2.2

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| だれが来たんですか。(F)<br><b>Dare ga kita n desu ka.</b><br>Who came?   | だれが来たの？(I)<br><b>Dare ga kita no?</b><br>Who came?  |
| 何を読んでいるんですか。(F)<br><b>Nani o yonde iru n desu ka.</b><br>What are you reading?                         | 何読んでいるの？(I)<br><b>Nani yonde ru no?</b>   |
| お昼は何にしますか。(F)<br><b>O-hiru wa nan(i) ni shimasu ka.</b><br>What will you (or shall we) have for lunch? | お昼は何にする？(I)<br><b>O-hiru wa nan ni suru?</b><br>What will you (or shall we) have for lunch? |

## 32.3 Negative questions

### 32.3.1 Regular negative questions

Negative questions are questions where the main predicate is in the negative form.

- 田中さんを見ませんでしたか。(F)  
**Tanaka-san o mimasen deshita ka.**
- 田中さん、見なかった？(I)  
**Tanaka-san, minakatta?**  
 Didn't you see Mr/Ms Tanaka?

Typically the use of negative questions implies that the speaker thinks or expects the affirmative is the case. In the above sentences, the speaker thinks or expects that the hearer might have seen Tanaka-san. However, when there is strong evidence that the negative action/state holds, negative questions can also imply the speaker's negative assumption as in the following.

この本はおもしろくないですか。  
**Kono hon wa omoshirokunai desu ka.**  
 Is this book not interesting?

### 32.3.2 *n ja nai desu ka* or *n ja arimasen ka*

The phrase **n ja nai desu ka** or **n ja arimasen ka** is a negative counterpart of **n desu ka**.

#### ▶ 15.1

勉強したんじゃないですか。(F)  
**Benkyoo shita n ja nai desu ka.**

勉強したんじゃないありませんか。(F)  
**Benkyoo shita n ja arimasen ka.**

勉強したんじゃない？(I)  
**Benkyoo shita n ja nai.**  
 Isn't it the case that you studied?

勉強しなかったんじゃないですか。(F)  
**Benkyoo shinakatta n ja nai desu ka.**

勉強しなかったんじゃないありませんか。(F)  
**Benkyoo shinakatta n ja arimasen ka.**

勉強しなかったんじゃない？(I)  
**Benkyoo shinakatta n ja nai?**  
 Isn't it the case that you did not study?

These forms (**n ja nai desu ka** or **n ja arimasen ka**) are negative in form but do not add any negative meaning to the sentence. By using these forms, the speaker conveys a strong assumption that what is stated preceding **n ja nai desu ka** or **n ja arimasen ka** is true.

### 32.3.3 Responding to a negative question

In responding to a negative question in English, the speaker says 'Yes' if the answer one is giving is affirmative, and 'No' if the answer is negative. In Japanese, what is important is the questioner's expectation of what the answer might be. If the questioner is expecting an affirmative answer and the answer is affirmative, **hai** or its variants is used to indicate that the respondent agrees with what the questioner implies or expects. If the questioner expects a negative answer and the answer is negative, again **hai** is used. If the questioner expects an affirmative answer and the answer is negative or vice versa, **ie** 'no' is used indicating that the respondent disagrees with what the questioner expects or assumes.

The speaker expects an affirmative answer.

Q: 田中さんを見ませんでしたか。  
**Tanaka-san o mimasen deshita ka.**  
 Didn't you see Mr/Ms Tanaka?

田中さん、見なかった？  
**Tanaka-san minakatta?**

A: はい、見ました。  
**Hai, mimashita.**  
 Yes, I did.

うん、見た(よ)。  
**Un, mita (yo).**

いいえ、見ませんでした。  
**Iie, mimasen deshita.**  
 No, I didn't.

ううん、見なかった(よ)。  
**Uun, minakatta (yo).**

The speaker expects a negative answer.

- Q: 勉強しなかったんじゃないですか。 勉強しなかったんじゃない?  
**Benkyoo shinakatta n ja nai desu ka.** **Benkyoo shinakatta n ja nai?**  
 Isn't it the case you did not study? (You did not study, right?)
- A: いいえ、勉強しました (よ)。 ううん、勉強した (よ)。  
**Iie, benkyoo shimashita (yo).** **Uun, benkyoo shita (yo).**  
 Yes, I did.
- はい、勉強しませんでした。 うん、勉強しなかった。  
**Hai, benkyoo shimasen deshita.** **Un, benkyoo shinakatta.**  
 No, I did not.

## 32.4 Ways of asking questions less abruptly/more politely

Questions can be prefaced by phrases such as **sumimasen** 'excuse me' or **chotto ukagaitai n desu ga** 'I would like to ask you a question, but . . .' This makes asking questions less abrupt and consequently more polite.

すみません、銀行はどこですか。  
**Sumimasen, ginkoo wa doko desu ka.**  
 Excuse me, where is the bank?

ちょっと伺いたいんですが、銀座へはどう行ったらいいんでしょうか。  
**Chotto ukagaitai n desu ga, Ginza e wa doo ittara ii n deshoo ka.**  
 I would like to ask you a question, but how can I get to Ginza?

Use of **deshoo** instead of **desu** can also make a question more polite.

いくらでしょうか。  
**Ikura deshoo ka.**  
 How much is it?

### ▶ 53.2.1

## 32.5 Other types of questions

### 32.5.1 'I wonder . . .'

Monologue-type questions such as . . . **ka na** and . . . **kashira** can serve as questions.

先生休みかな。 日本語がわかるかしら。  
**Sensee yasumi ka na.** **Nihongo ga wakaru kashira.**  
 I wonder if my teacher is absent. I wonder if (he/she) understands Japanese.

**Ka na** is a more masculine form, while **kashira** is a feminine form. However, these days both men and women use **ka na** in informal speech.

### ▶ 6.3

### 32.5.2 -kke

This expression is used when the speaker does not remember certain information and tries to recall it by enlisting the addressee's help in recalling the information. It has the sense of 'I seem to remember that . . . , but I am not sure. Can you tell me if it's right?' or 'I don't remember who/what/when, etc. Can you tell me?'. When the predicate is a verb or an **i**-adjective, this form is normally used with the past-tense form.

## Other types of questions

駅の前に本屋あったっけ。

**Eki no mae ni hon'ya atta-kke.**

Is there a bookstore in front of the station? I don't remember.

今年のクリスマスは日曜日だっけ。

**Kotoshi no kurisumasu wa nichiyoubi da-kke.**

Is this year's Christmas on Sunday? I don't remember.

会議は何時からでしたっけ。

**Kaigi wa nanji kara deshita-kke.**

I don't remember what time the meeting starts. Can you tell me?

去年の冬もこんなに寒かったっけ？

**Kyonen no fuyu mo konna ni samukatta-kke?**

I don't remember if it was this cold last winter. Was it this cold last winter?

## 32.5.3

## Rhetorical questions

Some question forms are used either as a request or to state one's opinion indirectly.

▶ 72.3; 74.3; 84.1.3