

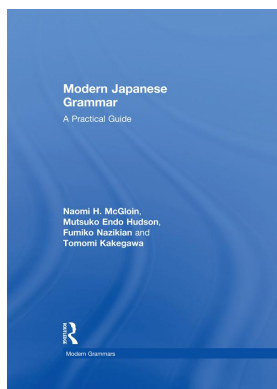
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Modern Japanese Grammar A Practical Guide

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Understanding and knowing

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Understanding and knowing

Japanese has two verbs which are used to express understanding and knowing but their usages do not always correspond to the ways the English verbs ‘understand’ and ‘know’ are used. **Shitte iru**, ‘to know,’ is generally used to indicate that one has information gained from external sources. **Wakaru**, ‘to understand,’ expresses the mental state that is achieved through an internal process or by figuring something out.

▶ 19.2.1

56.1 Spontaneous expression of understanding something

To communicate that one has understood something right there and then, the past tense affirmative form of **wakaru** ‘understand’ is used.

わかりました。
Wakarimashita.
I understand.

わかった。(I)
Wakatta.
I got it.

56.2 Saying that one understands a subject or a person

To indicate that one understands a subject, the verb **wakaru** is used. The direct object of **wakaru** is marked by **ga**.

日本語がわかります。
Nihongo ga wakarimasu.
I understand Japanese.

父は哲学がわかります。
Chichi wa tetsugaku ga wakarimasu.
My father understands philosophy.

To denote that one understands a person, the verb **wakaru** is also used. When the direct object of **wakaru** is a person, the particle **no** and the formal noun **koto** is used with the human object as in the following examples.

▶ 7.1; 18.1

夫のことがよくわかります。
Otto no koto ga yoku wakarimasu.
I understand my husband well.

日記を読んで娘のことがよくわかりました。
Nikki o yonde musume no koto ga yoku wakarimashita.
By reading her diary, I understood my daughter well.

56.3 Saying that one knows a person, place or object

To say that one knows a person or place, use X o **shitte iru/imasu**. In informal speech, **shitte iru** is usually pronounced as **shitte ru**.

Saying that one knows a person, place or object

私は田中さんを知っています。

Watashi wa Tanaka-san o shitte imasu.

I know Mr/Ms Tanaka.

長野を知ってる。

Nagano o shitteru.

I know Nagano.

To convey that one knows something beyond a superficial level, X **no koto o shitte iru** ‘know things about X’ is used.

▶ 18.1

僕は彼女のことをよく知っています。

Boku wa kanojo no koto o yoku shitte imasu.

I know my girlfriend well.

パリのことを知っています。

Pari no koto o shitte imasu.

I know Paris.

To ask if someone knows a person or place, **shitte imasu ka** (F) or **shitteru?** (I) is used.

「ガスト」というレストランを知っていますか。

‘Gasuto’ to yuu resutoran o shitte imasu ka.

Do you know the restaurant called Gusto?

佐藤さん、知ってる？

Satoo-san, shitteru?

Do you know Mr/Ms Sato?

To ask if someone knows an object, X **wa nani ka shitte imasu ka** (F) or **shitteru?** (I) is used.

除湿器は何か知っていますか。

Joshitsuki wa nani ka shitte imasu ka.

Do you know what a dehumidifier is?

You can also use X **tte shitte imasu ka** or **shitteru**.

iPad って知ってる？

iPad tte shitteru?

Do you know what an iPad is?

To convey that one doesn’t know a person, place or object, use **shiranai/shirimasen**, not **shitte inai** or **shitte imasen**.

僕は鈴木さんの家族を知らない。

Boku wa Suzuki-san no kazoku o shiranai.

I don’t know Mr/Ms Suzuki’s family.

私はいいレストランを全然知りません。

Watashi wa ii resutoran o zenzen shirimasen.

I don’t know any good restaurants at all.

When one doesn’t know one’s own plan or idea, **wakaranai/wakarimasen** is used rather than **shiranai/shirimasen**.

まだ今週末は何をするか分かりません。

Mada kon shuumatsu wa nani o suru ka wakarimasen.

I don’t know what I will do this weekend yet.

Q: どう思う？

Doo omou?

What do you think?

A: 分からない。

Wakaranai.

I don’t know.

When asked for information that one does not have, it is possible to respond either with **wakaranai/wakarimasen** ‘I can’t figure it out’ or **shiranai/shirimasen** ‘I don’t know’ depending on the situation.

- A: 田中さんに連絡したいのですが、電話番号を知っていますか。
Tanaka-san ni renraku shitai no desu ga, denwabangoo o shitte imasu ka.
 I want to contact Mr/Ms Tanaka, so do you know his/her phone number?
- B: ちょっとわかりません/知りません。
Chotto wakarimasen/shirimasen.
 I don’t really know.

In the above example, speaker A is not merely asking whether B has the information but is also understood to be seeking assistance. In such a case, **wakaranai/wakarimasen** is a more sensible answer. Responding with **shiranai/shirimasen** sounds uncaring when assistance is sought.

56.4 Expressing knowledge of a subject or a skill

Shitte iru/imasu is used to denote that one has some knowledge of a subject or a skill.

- 東洋医学（のこと）を知っています。
Tooyoo igaku (no koto) o shitte imasu.
 I know oriental traditional medicine.
- ケーキの作り方は知ってるよ。
Keeki no tsukurikata wa shitteru yo.
 I know how to make a cake.
- 私は作曲（のこと）を知っています。
Watashi wa sakkyoku (no koto) o shitte imasu.
 I know musical composition.

Ni tsuite may be used in place of the direct object particle **o** with the subject or skill.

- アメリカの法律について知っています。
Amerika no hooritsu ni tsuite shitte imasu.
 I know about American law.
- 東洋医学についてよく知っています。
Tooyoo igaku ni tsuite yoku shitte imasu.
 I know a good deal about (= well) oriental traditional medicine.

Another way to express one’s knowledge of a subject is by using the noun **chishiki** ‘knowledge.’

- 数学の知識があります。
Suugaku no chishiki ga arimasu.
 I have knowledge of mathematics.
- 応急処置の知識がある。
Ookyuushochi no chishiki ga aru.
 I have knowledge of first aid.