

Romaji Edition

# 80/20 JAPANESE

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**RICHARD WEBB**

Hi there!

Thank you for downloading this sample from my book, *80/20 Japanese*.

This sample from the *Romaji Edition* includes the complete table of contents, followed by *Chapter 2: Introduction to Japanese Grammar*.

As you read through the chapter, please do not worry if you are not sure how to say the Japanese words that appear. If you decide to purchase the book, you will learn about pronunciation in *Chapter 1: The Sounds of Japanese*.

I hope you enjoy the chapter! If you decide that you would like to purchase the complete book, you can do so at <https://8020japanese.com>.

Thank you,

Richard Webb

Author of *80/20 Japanese*

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## Chapter 2

# Introduction to Japanese Grammar

The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand how the Japanese language is structured. Sentence structure in any language determines how words are used together to form meaning. The content in this chapter is quite heavy, but once you overcome the extreme differences between English and Japanese sentence structure, the language becomes much easier.

## 2.1 Basic Japanese sentence structure

### New vocabulary

to be (am/are/is)	desu*
this	kore
that	sore
car	kuruma
red	akai
I/me	watashi
person	hito

\* In the word “desu”, the “u” is usually not voiced, hence this should be pronounced “dess”.

Let's start with some basic sentences.

1. I am a person                      watashi wa hito desu
2. This is a car                      kore wa kuruma desu
3. My car is red                      watashi no kuruma wa akai desu
4. That is Taro's car              sore wa Tarō no kuruma desu

Looking at these sentences, you may notice that:

- Every sentence ends in “desu” (pronounced “dess”)
- Every sentence contains a “wa”

“Desu” is effectively the verb “to be”, which in the above cases takes the form “is” or “am”. In Japanese, **the verb always comes at the end of the sentence.**

“Wa” is what is known as a particle (particles will be explained in greater detail later). Its purpose is to identify the topic of the sentence. In English, the topic (or subject) of a sentence is whatever comes before the main verb, which in the above cases is either “is” or “am”. In Japanese, the topic of a sentence is whatever comes before “wa”.

Now that we know this, let's take another look at sentences one and two. Text with the same formatting has the same meaning.

1. I *am* a person                      **watashi** wa hito *desu*
2. **This** *is* a car                      **kore** wa kuruma *desu*

First of all, we can see that “wa” has no English equivalent. This is because its entire purpose is to show that “watashi” or “kore” is the topic of these sentences. There is no English equivalent because in English, word order alone is enough to determine the subject of a sentence.

Secondly, since “hito” means person and “kuruma” means car, we can see that there is no Japanese equivalent of “a”. The articles “a”, “an” and “the” simply do not exist in Japanese. This makes things simpler in some ways, but can be hard to get used to for someone used to English or similar languages, as not having these words can sometimes make a sentence feel as though it is lacking somehow.

Now let's look at sentences 3 and 4.

3. **My car** *is* red                      **watashi no kuruma** wa akai *desu*
4. **That** *is* Taro's car              **sore** wa Tarō no kuruma *desu*



Here we can see that:

- “watashi no kuruma” = “my car”, and
- “Tarō no kuruma” = “Taro’s car”

Adding “no”, another particle, indicates possession. It converts “I”, “you”, “he”, “she” and “they” into “my”, “your”, “his”, “her” and “their”, respectively. For other things like people’s names, animals, places and objects, it has the same effect as adding “’s” (apostrophe s).

The one-size-fits-all way of defining “no” would be to say it is equal to English “of”. For example, instead of “Taro’s car”, “Tarō no kuruma” could be thought of as “the car of Taro”. This is more versatile as there are plenty of situations in English where “’s” is not normally appropriate. “No” can be used to connect just about any two things, where one of the two things belongs to the other in some way, such as “the back of the door”, “the color of your eyes” or even “the rain of yesterday”.

To summarize what we have learned about Japanese sentence structure so far:

- The verb comes at the end of the sentence
- The particle “wa” defines the topic of the sentence, and has no English equivalent
- There is no “a”, “an” or “the”
- The particle “no” indicates possession

## 2.2 Introduction to particles

Now that you have a basic understanding of some simple sentences, we will look at the most important concept relating to Japanese sentence structure - particles. Particles are like small words that go in between other words to help a sentence make sense. They are somewhat like prepositions in English (in, at, on, from, to etc.), but only in some cases, and thinking of them as the equivalent of prepositions will likely cause you unnecessary confusion.

Put simply, **particles determine the role of each word relative to the verb.**

Understanding what this really means will make learning Japanese grammar much, much easier.

To illustrate what is meant by “the role of each word”, let’s first consider how the English language works. In English, the role of words in a sentence is determined primarily by word order. Take the following example:

John saw Jane.

From the word order, we know:

- a) John was the person who did the seeing
- b) Jane was the person who was seen

If we change the word order, it changes the meaning of the sentence. We can say “Jane saw John”, and it makes grammatical sense, but it does not mean the same thing. This is because English sentences always follow the pattern [subject] + [verb] + [object].

The *subject* of a sentence is the person/animal/thing that is performing the action described by the verb. In this case, “John” is the subject because John is the one performing the act of seeing. We know this because “John” comes before the verb “saw”.

The *object* of a sentence is the person/animal/thing that the action is performed on. In this case, “Jane” is the object because she is the one who was seen by John, and we know this because “Jane” comes after the verb “saw”.

As you can see, in English, *word order* determines the role of each word in the sentence and, in particular, how each word relates to the *verb*.

In Japanese, instead of word order, particles determine the role of each word and how they relate to the verb. Word order is important too, but not to the same extent. Word order in Japanese mainly influences the natural flow, and has more of an effect on where the emphasis lies within a sentence than on its literal meaning. Don’t worry about this too much for now - the important thing to know is that particles, not word order, determine how all the words in a sentence relate to each other.

The simple sentence “John saw Jane” could be written in Japanese as follows:

John wa Jane wo mimashita

Firstly, as you may have guessed, “mimashita” is the verb “to see” in the past tense. Note that for verbs in the past tense, the “i” after the “sh” is usually silent, hence this would be read as “mimashta”.

Also in this sentence are the two particles, “wa” and “wo”. Like all particles, these ones define the role of the words that come *before* them.

In general terms:

- “wa” defines the topic of the sentence, as we discussed earlier.

- “wo” defines the object of the verb. Recall from chapter one that the “w” in “wo” is silent, and is therefore simply pronounced “o”.

So in the above sentence:

- “wa” defines “John” as the topic of the sentence, meaning John is the person who performed the act of seeing
- “wo” defines “Jane” as the object of the verb “saw”, meaning Jane is the person who was seen

By putting this together, we can see that:

John wa Jane wo mimashita = John saw Jane

## Exercise

So far, we have seen the particles “wa”, “no” and “wo”. Recall that:

- “wa” defines the topic of a sentence or clause
  - “wo” defines the object of the verb
  - “no” indicates possession
1. Identify the topic of each of the following sentences. Keep in mind that the topic is one ‘thing’ and can be more than one word.
    - a) I watched the baseball game
    - b) This apple is green
    - c) My sister is listening to music
    - d) The red bike is faster than the blue one
    - e) The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog
  2. Identify the object of the verb in each of the following sentences. Like the topic, the object can also be more than one word.
    - a) He ate a hamburger
    - b) Alan watched TV
    - c) I read a fascinating book
    - d) Her older brother bought a mobile phone
    - e) My grandfather drank a big glass of water

3. Using the vocabulary provided, translate these phrases into Japanese.

- a) My friend
- b) His mother
- c) Her bicycle
- d) Jiro's book
- e) My friend's dog

### Vocabulary

I	watashi
he	kare
she	kanojo
friend	tomodachi

mother	okāsan
bicycle	jitensha
book	hon
dog	inu

### Answers

- 1. a. I; b. this apple; c. my sister; d. the red bike; e. the quick brown fox
- 2. a. a hamburger; b. TV; c. a fascinating book; d. a mobile phone; e. a big glass of water
- 3. a. watashi no tomodachi; b. kare no okāsan; c. kanojo no jitensha; d. Jirō no hon; e. watashi no tomodachi no inu

## 2.3 Particles in more depth

To further your understanding of particles, we will now look at “wa”, “wo” and “no” in action, while also introducing a couple more common particles.

Here is the vocabulary for this section:

Verbs* (past tense)	
went	ikimashita
watched	mimashita
came	kimashita

Nouns	
school	gakkō
movie	eiga
house	ie

\* For all of the verbs above, the last “i” is usually silent.

We will now break down the following sentences. Particles are bolded.

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. I watched a movie           | watashi <b>wa</b> eiga <b>wo</b> mimashita                  |
| 2. Taro went to school         | Tarō <b>wa</b> gakkō <b>ni</b> ikimashita                   |
| 3. Taro came to my house       | Tarō <b>wa</b> watashi <b>no</b> ie <b>ni</b> kimashita     |
| 4. I went to school with Taro  | watashi <b>wa</b> Tarō <b>to</b> gakkō <b>ni</b> ikimashita |
| 5. I watched a movie with Taro | watashi <b>wa</b> Tarō <b>to</b> eiga <b>wo</b> mimashita   |

Notice that every noun in each sentence is followed by a particle. This is almost always true because nouns represent things, and how these things are affected by actions always needs to be defined, which is what particles are for.

Let's start by deconstructing sentence one:

1. watashi **wa** eiga **wo** mimashita

Here you can see that:

- “wa” comes after “watashi”. This means that “watashi” is the topic.
- “wo” comes after “eiga”. This means that “eiga” is the object of the verb “mimashita”.

This sentence says that I am the person who performed the act of watching, and it is a movie that I watched. In other words, “I watched a movie”.

Make sense?

Now let's compare this to sentence two.

1. watashi **wa** eiga **wo** mimashita
2. Tarō **wa** gakkō **ni** ikimashita

In sentence two, we can see that Taro is the topic, and he performed the act of going. There is, however, no “wo”. Instead “gakkō”, meaning “school”, is followed by the particle “ni”.

**The particle “ni” defines the destination related to an action that involves movement.**

This includes actions described by verbs like go, come, move, give, send, return, etc. It is very similar to the English preposition “to”, although they are not perfectly equivalent. Note that “ni” also has a number of other meanings, which will be covered later.

In sentence two, we can see that “ni” comes after “gakkō”, indicating that school is the destination. Putting this together, we know that Taro is the person who went somewhere, and his destination was school, hence sentence two means, “Taro went to school”.

3. Tarō **wa** watashi **no** ie **ni** kimashita

The particles we see here are “wa”, “no” and “ni”, so we know that:

- Taro performed the action, which in this case is “came”
- The place that he came to is “watashi no ie”

Remembering that “no” indicates possession, “watashi no ie” means “my house”. This comes before “ni”, so Taro’s destination must be my house, and the full sentence therefore means, “Taro came to my house”.

Now let’s take a look at sentence four.

4. watashi **wa** Tarō **to** gakkō **ni** ikimashita

We can see that I (watashi) performed the action, the action is went (ikimashita), and the destination is school (gakkō), but we also have “Tarō to” in there as well.

**The particle “to” indicates who or what else is involved in the action in the same way.**

Basically, “Tarō to” means “with Taro”, making the whole sentence equivalent to, “I went to school with Taro”.

The particle “to” is often compared to “and” in English, but “and” is much more versatile than “to”. “To” can only be used to join nouns together, whereas “and” can be used to join virtually any two phrases together that are grammatically equal. For example, you cannot use the particle “to” to say something like, “I went to school and watched a movie,” because the “and” in this sentence doesn’t join two nouns. For this reason, it is more appropriate to think of “to” as meaning “with”, even if “and” is the more natural choice when speaking English.

One alternative way to express the same meaning as sentence four, although with a slightly different emphasis, is to say, “watashi to tarō wa gakkō ni ikimashita”. Let’s compare these directly:

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| a) watashi wa tarō to gakkō ni ikimashita | I went to school with Taro |
| b) watashi to tarō wa gakkō ni ikimashita | Taro and I went to school  |

### Indirect objects

In the previous section, we discussed how the object of a verb in Japanese is marked by the particle “wo”. The particle “wo” is actually used to mark the *direct* object. In English, we also have *indirect* objects. These, however, do not exist in Japanese, so a brief explanation might be helpful.

Consider the sentence, “I sent you a letter”. In this sentence, the direct object is “a letter”, because that is what is being sent. The indirect object is “you”, because that is who the letter is being sent to. In English, the indirect object (you) is placed in between the verb (sent) and the direct object (a letter). It defines the *recipient of the action*. However, there is always another way of phrasing a sentence that uses an indirect object. In this case, that would be, “I sent a letter *to you*”. This is closer to how it would be phrased in Japanese. Here are some more examples:

I gave <b>you</b> a gift	=	I gave a gift <b>to you</b>
I showed <b>him</b> a picture	=	I showed a picture <b>to him</b>
I bought <b>her</b> a present	=	I bought a present <b>for her</b>
I baked <b>Emma</b> a cake	=	I baked a cake <b>for Emma</b>

Notice that the alternative phrases always use “to” or “for”.

In Japanese, like everything else, particles are used to define the recipient of the action. **Think of the recipient as the destination.** For “I sent you a letter”, the destination of the letter is “you”, so “you” should be marked with the particle “ni”. The sentence would therefore be:

watashi wa **anata ni** tegami wo okurimashita

*I            you            letter            sent*

The same applies when the English phrase uses “for”. In the example above, Emma is the recipient of the cake, and this would be expressed by saying “Emma ni”. There is, however, more to it than that, as will be covered in Chapter 12.3.3. For now, focus on the examples that more clearly involve movement to a destination.

In option (a), “watashi” is the only thing before “wa”, so “watashi” is the topic. This means the focus of the sentence is me, and Taro’s presence is additional information. This is more likely to be the answer to the question, “What did you do?”

In option (b), “watashi to tarō” comes before “wa”, so “watashi to tarō” is the topic. This means both Taro and I are the focus of the sentence equally. This is more likely to be the answer to the question, “What did you and Taro do?”

In the end, they both have essentially the same meaning. The difference in emphasis is small enough that it really doesn’t make much difference, so just use whichever one makes the most sense to you.

Sentence five is similar to sentence four.

5. watashi **wa** Tarō **to** eiga **wo** mimashita

We can break this down as follows:

- I (watashi) am the person who performed the action
- Taro is also involved in the action in the same way as me
- The object of the action was a movie (eiga)
- The action was “watched” (mimashita)

The sentence must therefore mean, “I watched a movie with Taro”, and just like sentence four, this could also be rearranged to, “watashi to tarō wa eiga wo mimashita”.

If we ignore the particles, we can see that the important elements of the sentence are: I, Taro, movie, watched. The particles are there to define the role of each of these words, thus defining their relationship with one another. Without them, we can’t be sure what actually happened. We can probably guess what happened, but what if Taro is a film director? Instead of watching a movie with Taro, maybe I actually want to say “I watched Taro’s movie” (watashi wa Tarō no eiga wo mimashita). This uses the same key words, but the relationship between these words is different. This is why particles are so important.

## Exercise

In this exercise, you will build simple sentences using the particles covered so far.

Complete tasks 1 - 6 for each of the sentences a - m below. Vocabulary is provided for each sentence so you can focus on the grammatical aspects of each sentence.

1. Identify the topic of each sentence and say it in Japanese followed by “wa”. Be aware that the subject can be more than one word.



2. Identify any extra people involved in the action of each sentence. Say them in Japanese followed by “to”.
3. Identify the destination, if there is one, of the person or object in each sentence. Say it in Japanese followed by “ni”.
4. Identify the object of each sentence and say it in Japanese followed by “wo”. Keep in mind that some sentences do not have an object (including a and b).
5. Translate each of the phrases into Japanese and write them down. Check your answers on the following page.
6. Without looking at your answers from the previous questions, say each of the sentences aloud in Japanese. Check your answers as you go and if you make any mistakes, say the sentence again correctly before moving on. Once you have finished all of the sentences, go back and repeat any that you said incorrectly the first time.

a) This is a pen

this	kore
pen	pen
is	desu

b) My name is [your name]

I / me	watashi
name	namae
is	desu

c) I ate an apple

I / me	watashi
ate	tabemashita
apple	ringo

d) You drank water

you	anata
drank	nomimashita
water	mizu

- e) He bought a mobile phone

he	kare
bought	kaimashita
mobile phone	keitai

- f) She read the newspaper

she	kanojo
read (past tense)	yomimashita
newspaper	shinbun

- g) Your mother wrote a book

you	anata
mother	okāsan
wrote	kakimashita
book	hon

- h) His father studied Japanese

he / him	kare
father	otōsan
studied	benkyō shimashita
Japanese (language)	nihongo

- i) My friend made sushi with Aiko

I / me	watashi
friend	tomodachi
made	tsukurimashita
sushi	sushi

- j) Her older sister listened to music with him

she / her	kanojo
he / him	kare
older sister	onēsan

listen	kikimashita
music	ongaku

k) Her older brother went to my school

she / her	kanojo
I / me	watashi
older brother	onīsan
went	ikimashita
school	gakkō

l) He came to my house with Taro

he / him	kare
I / me	watashi
came	kimashita
house	ie

m) She sent a letter to her grandmother

she / her	kanojo
sent	okurimashita
letter	tegami
grandmother	obāsan

n) Our grandfather taught English to Mai and Kazutaka

we / us	watashi tachi
grandfather	ojīsan
taught	oshiemashita
English (language)	eigo

o) They gave Mako's mother a souvenir

they	karera
gave	agemashita
mother	okāsan
souvenir	omiyage

p) Yutaka and I gave Kenta a jacket

I / me	watashi
gave	agemashita
jacket	uwagi

## Answers

	Task 1	Task 2
a)	kore wa	-
b)	watashi no namae wa	-
c)	watashi wa	-
d)	anata wa	-
e)	kare wa	-
f)	kanojo wa	-
g)	anata no okāsan wa	-
h)	kare no otōsan wa	-
i)	watashi no tomodachi wa	Aiko to
j)	kanojo no onēsan wa	kare to
k)	kanojo no onīsan wa	-
l)	kare wa	Tarō to
m)	kanojo wa	-
n)	watashi tachi no ojīsan wa	Mai to <i>or</i> Kazutaka to
o)	karera wa	-
p)	watashi to Yutaka wa <i>or</i> Yutaka to watashi wa	watashi to <i>or</i> Yutaka to

	Task 3	Task 4
a)	-	-
b)	-	-
c)	-	ringo wo
d)	-	mizu wo
e)	-	keitai wo
f)	-	shinbun wo
g)	-	hon wo
h)	-	nihongo wo

i)	-	sushi wo
j)	-	ongaku wo
k)	watashi no gakkō ni	-
l)	watashi no ie ni	-
m)	kanojo no obāsan ni	tegami wo
n)	Mai to Kazutaka ni	eigo wo
o)	Mako no okāsan ni	omiyage wo
p)	Kenta ni	uwagi wo

### Tasks 5 and 6

- a) kore wa pen desu
- b) watashi no namae wa [your name] desu
- c) watashi wa ringo wo tabemashita
- d) anata wa mizu wo nomimashita
- e) kare wa keitai wo kaimashita
- f) kanojo wa shinbun wo yomimashita
- g) anata no okāsan wa hon wo kakimashita
- h) kare no otōsan wa nihongo wo benkyō shimashita
- i) watashi no tomodachi wa Aiko to sushi wo tsukurimashita
- j) kanojo no onēsan wa kare to ongaku wo kikimashita
- k) kanojo no onīsan wa watashi no gakkō ni ikimashita
- l) kare wa Tarō to watashi no ie ni kimashita
- m) kanojo wa kanojo no obāsan ni tegami wo okurimashita
- n) watashi tachi no ojisan wa Mai to Kazutaka ni eigo wo oshiemashita
- o) karera wa Mako no okāsan ni omiyage wo agemashita
- p) watashi to Yutaka wa Kenta ni uwagi wo agemashita, OR  
Yutaka to watashi wa Kenta ni uwagi wo agemashita