



Learn Japanese Pod with Ami and Alex

Series 02 Podcast 13: How to speak fluent Japanese

Podcast Link: [Podcast 13 - How to speak fluent Japanese](#)

In this lesson you will learn the following:

- ✓ Tips, tricks and techniques for improving your Japanese fluency
- ✓ How to ask your teacher for advice on speaking fluently in Japanese
- ✓ The best resources out there to help improve your conversational Japanese



How to Speak Japanese Fluently

In this podcast, Ami and I take you through the techniques, strategies and mindset for speaking Japanese fluently. We also feature a Japanese role play where I ask Ami Sensei her advice on how to improve fluency which is below.

Vocabulary featured in the podcast

Japanese	Pronunciation	English
先生	Sensei	Teacher
質問	Shitsumon	Question
流暢	Ryuuchō	Fluent
話せる	Hanaseru	To be able to speak
教材	Kyōzai	Study materials
テレビ	Terebi	TV
音楽	Ongaku	Music
なるほど	Naruhodo	I see
友達	Tomodachi	Friend
住んだ	Sunda	Lived
他	Hoka	Other / Another
積極的に	Sekkyokuteki ni	Positively
会話	Kaiwa	Conversation
分かりました	Wakarimasu	I understand
頑張ります	Ganbarimasu	I'll do my best



Podcast Dialog

Japanese	Pronunciation	English
A: 先生、質問しても良いですか？	Sensei, shitsumon shite mo ii desu ka.	Teacher, may I ask a question?
B: はい、どうぞ。	Hai dōzo.	Sure, go ahead.
A: どうすれば日本語を流暢に話せるようになりますか？	Dō sureba nihongo o ryuuchō ni hanaseru you ni narimasu ka?	How can I become fluent at speaking Japanese?
B: そうですね。やっぱり教材はもちろんですが、日本のテレビを観たり、日本の音楽をたくさん聴いてみてください。	Sō desu ne. Yappari kyōzai wa mochiron desu ga, nihon no terebi o mitari, nihongo no ongaku o takusan kiite kudasai.	Let me see. Well of course you need study materials but you should watch Japanese TV, listen to a lot of music, stuff like that.
A: なるほど。	Naruhodo.	I see.
B: 私の友達は、日本に住んだことはないですが、そうやって日本語を結構覚えましたよ。	Watashi no tomodachi wa nihon ni sunda koto ga nai desu ga sō yatte nihongo o kekkō oboemashita yo.	I have a friend who never lived in Japan. However, he learned a lot of Japanese that way.
A: 他に何かアドバイスはありますか？	Hoka ni adobaisu ga arimasu ka?	Do you have any other advice?
B: 日本語が話せる友達を作って、積極的に日本語で会話をしましょう。	Nihongo ga hanaseru tomodachi o tsukutte, sekkkyokuteki ni nihongo de kaiwa o shimashou.	Make Japanese speaking friends and proactively try to have conversations in Japanese.
A: 分かりました。頑張ります！	Wakarimashita. Ganbarimasu.	I understand. I will do my best.



Everything You Need to Know to Speak Japanese Fluently

One of the most common questions I get at Learn Japanese Pod is about how to achieve fluency in Japanese. The usual problem I hear is that although students study lots of vocabulary and grammar, they can't seem to put it together to hold even a simple conversation. Fluency seems out of the question. Well, I hear you because I used to be in the same situation. I was really frustrated. However, after a lot of trial and error... and coffee, I eventually began to discover some effective study techniques, strategies and the mindset that actually worked. Now, fluency didn't happen overnight but my ability to hold natural flowing conversations with my Japanese friends got noticeably better and my progress definitely sped up. So if you are feeling confused, frustrated and your motivation is crumbling, it's time to get your Japanese back on track. Here is absolutely everything you need to know to speak Japanese fluently.

The Secret to Speaking Japanese Fluently

Here's the brutal truth.

There is no secret to speaking fluent Japanese. And if anyone tells you there is a magical course that teaches you how to speak perfect Japanese in 3 days, buy a fire extinguisher because someone's pants are on fire. It takes time, commitment and hard work...and coffee...I mentioned coffee right?

Anyway, I can't give you a magic pill BUT...

And this is a big but...

I can tell you the dumb things I did so you don't have to. And that's going to save you a LOT of time and frustration. Plus there are more efficient and effective ways to study that will further save time.

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But what do we actually mean by “fluency”?

What does “fluent Japanese” mean?

Fluent doesn't necessarily mean native speaker level. To me, fluency simply means you can express what you want to say, clearly, easily and quickly without getting stuck or stumbling over your words. If you can order sushi or do a simple self introduction in Japanese, you have a basic level of fluency. No, you're not native level but you could survive in Japan with a limited number of phrases. So don't feel overwhelmed. Remember fluency isn't how much you know, it's how well you use it.

So, let's move to the first step you need to take on your journey to Japanese fluency.



1. Set Specific Goals



Perhaps the biggest mistake students of Japanese make is not being clear about what they want to achieve. You need to set clear, specific goals, broken down into small achievable steps with deadlines. And here are my personal reasons:

1. Set it and forget it – This avoids stress and decision fatigue worrying over what you should study next. It keeps it simple.
2. Focus equals momentum – A focused goal gets you to where you want to go more quickly.
3. Goals avoid waste – If you get super specific about what to achieve you avoid wasteful and irrelevant study



4. Deadlines make it real – Set a date to increase the chances of success. A deadline further focuses you and makes your goals more concrete. Breaking things into small steps with many deadlines can help to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

What's a good Japanese Study Goal?

So what's a good goal? If you say "I want to speak kick ass, ninja level Japanese" that's all well and good but it's too vague and lacks a clear goal. Something better would be "I want to be able to say 100 travel related phrases fluently for my trip to Japan in three months".

Now you know the following:

1. Exactly what you will study
2. Exactly how much you need to study
3. When your deadline is

Breaking down your goal into small achievable steps will increase your chances of success. So learning 100 phrases in 3 months is a pace of just over 1 phrase a day, totally achievable.

Try to set a goal that inspires and motivates you. Also, try to pick a goal that allows you to be able to do something. You want to build skills rather than simply piling up words. Here are some examples:

I want to learn all the phrases to order food at a Japanese restaurant within 2 weeks.

I want to be able to ask and understand directions in Japanese in one month.

To really demonstrate how a short and laser focused goal can help you make progress more quickly, try out my completely free [5 Day Japanese Challenge](#). It emails you a new lesson every day and if



you follow the course properly you will be able to give a natural self introduction in flawless Japanese in five days.

If you are still not sure what goal to set, choose something, anything, simply to get started. For example, you could attempt to pass the N5 Japanese Language Proficiency Test in 6 months. And even if you fail the test, you will have still improved your Japanese.



2. Get the Right Japanese Study Materials



Now you have a clear goal, you will need good materials and resources to study with. This depends on your goal and level of Japanese. For beginners, I recommend buying a good standard Japanese textbook. Now, this won't guarantee fluency, however, a good textbook will teach you the basic grammar and vocabulary you need to build your base before you can attempt conversations. Here are some of my top recommendations:



Recommendations for basic Japanese textbooks

[GENKI I](#) – This is good standard textbook used in university Japanese courses. This is more grammar heavy so it will give you a good language base to build on. It includes an audio CD which you can use to listen and practice with. [Japanese for Busy People](#) is another widely known text good for teaching you the basics.

[Nihongo Fun and Easy](#) – A smaller but awesome little Japanese conversational textbook that focuses more on daily situational dialogs and includes a CD to practice with. This is not as comprehensive as Genki but might get you speaking basic Japanese more quickly.

[NIHONGO Breakthrough](#) – Another really good Japanese conversational textbook that focuses on real life situations and natural language to improve your basic level of fluency.

Again, these textbooks won't make you fluent over night. However, they will give you the essential base Japanese grammar and vocabulary you need to work towards fluency.

And textbooks on their own are not enough. We need to look at some effective techniques to get you speaking more fluently in less time.



3. Drill, Drill and Drill Again



If there was only one single technique I could teach you that would massively help your fluency, that would be drilling. It's an incredibly powerful technique that will build your vocabulary, speed, pronunciation and fluency.

Drilling is simply repeating phrases out loud over and over again until you can say them easily and without thinking.

I first started studying Japanese on my own. I bought a random Japanese conversation textbook, read the dialogs, listened to the audio and repeated every phrase and conversation until I could say



them automatically. The book wasn't that great and some of the conversations were kind of boring and not even that useful. Here is a reconstruction of the silly things I drilled:

Japanese	Pronunciation	English
A: 田中さんの車は どこの車ですか	Tanaka san no kuruma wa doko no kuruma desu ka	Mr. Tanaka, what make of car is that?
B: トヨタの車です	Toyota no kuruma desu	It's a Toyota
A: <u>あ</u> 、そうですか	A sou desu ka	Oh really?

One would have thought a more interesting conversation would have been:

A: Hey Tanaka, what make of car is that?

B: See the sign that says Toyota on the front? Yeah that means it's a Toyota...you idiot!

ANYWAY...

It wasn't the best textbook in the world. However, drilling the dialogs out loud repeatedly really helped it all stick in my head. And as I discovered it improved my memory, pronunciation, speed and fluency. I didn't become fluent immediately but my progress noticeably did speed up.



Gap Fill Drills

Another effective technique I discovered was gap fills. A gap fill is drilling a sentence and changing one word every time you repeat it. Take the following sentence and say this as many times as it takes to stick in your head:

日本語を上達させるためには勉強が大事だ

Nihongo o jōtatsu suru tame ni wa benkyō ga daiji da

To improve your Japanese fluency, **study** is important.

Now you have learned that, you can say it again but this time change the word in red to something else so you can make a new sentence.

日本語を上達させるめには読書が大事だ

Nihongo o jōtatsu suru tame ni wa dokusho ga daiji da

To improve your Japanese fluency, **study** is important.

You can also use a little humour to make things fun and memorable.

日本語を上達させるためにはコーヒーが大事だ

Nihongo o jōtatsu suru tame ni wa kōhii ga daiji da

To improve your Japanese fluency, **coffee** is important.

The reason I love this technique is it allows you to drill and learn useful patterns of speech. But it also allows you to create an almost infinite number of new unique sentences. This is how fluency begins.



Shadowing

One last technique is shadowing. Shadowing involves playing audio and repeating out loud exactly what you hear. So just listen and repeat. The textbooks I mentioned earlier have audio CDs you can use.

You could also shadow using youtube videos and even music CDs if you have them. Karaoke is also a great way to build your listening and speaking skills.

So there are various ways to drill and all very effective in building your spoken muscle memory so you can develop automatic recall which is what you will need to speak Japanese fluently.



4. Paraphrase to develop Japanese Fluency



Paraphrasing is the ability to express the meaning of something using different words. Being able to say the same thing using different words or phrases massively boosts your fluency because it forces you to expand your spoken vocabulary. It's not an easy skill and requires a fair amount of study. However it is worth it because it is a powerful technique for boosting your fluency.

There are various ways you can paraphrase. Here are my favourite three.



Explain a Japanese word in Japanese

Being able to define a Japanese word in Japanese is a great exercise. For example, let's use the word 暑い – Atsui – which as you probably know means hot. But can you describe what it means in Japanese? You could say 温度の高いもの – Ondo no takai mono – something with a high temperature. To do this yourself, use a good online Japanese dictionary such as the Goo dictionary at dictionary.goo.ne.jp

Japanese Synonyms

The second way is to find a synonym, that is another word which has a similar meaning. So you could use the word 熱 – Netsu – which means heat or fever. Or perhaps you can use the word 暖かい – Atatakai – which means warm.

Japanese Antonyms

The third way is to find an antonym, a phrase that means the opposite. If you use the negative form, it's another way to paraphrase a word. For example, instead of 暑い you could say 寒くない which means not cold.

You don't have to use all these techniques but being able to define a Japanese word in Japanese is a really powerful skill you should study towards. Again, use a good Japanese dictionary to help you.

There's a good chapter on paraphrasing in Japanese in the book [13 Secrets for Speaking Fluent Japanese](#) by Giles Murray.



5. Practice with Native Japanese Speakers



Now, I know some of you might be shy, attached to your textbook or live in an area where there are very few Japanese people. One of the most common complaints I hear is “I have no Japanese friends to practice with”.

However, if you really want to eventually be able to speak Japanese fluently you **HAVE TO** get out there and practice with native speakers. I know what you’re going to say; it’s impossible because [insert reason here...]. So here are some ideas that might possibly work for you.



1. Get a Japanese teacher or enrol on a Japanese course.
2. Use Meetup.com to locate and join a Japanese study group in your area. If not, make your own group. You never know, there may be other people interested in studying Japanese.
3. Attend Japanese cultural events. Institutions such as [The Japan Society](#) based in New York hold regular events for promoting Japanese culture. There may be an event closer to you than you think!
4. Use online language exchange sites. Although this is not an endorsement, you MIGHT find sites such as [Lang-8](#) and [iTalki](#) useful for making online Japanese friends to practice with.

If those methods don't work for you, then there is only one option left...



5. Go to Japan



I was incredibly lucky to be able to study Japanese intensively for one year in Tokyo when I was in university. I was able to take advantage of the language exchange program between my university in London and Tokyo.

When I got to Japan, I had studied Japanese for a year. However, after living in a dormitory of Japanese guys who spoke next to no English and studying intensively everyday, my Japanese fluency rapidly improved.



Not only that, it was one of the most enjoyable years I had at university. In fact if I hadn't had that year, I don't think my Japanese would be anywhere as good as it was today.

So I highly recommend coming to Japan to fully immerse yourself in the culture, language and life in Japan. If you keep studying and practising I guarantee you will make speedier progress than just studying on your own at home.

If a year of intensive study sounds daunting, time consuming and expensive, I won't lie, it is. However, even if you can only manage to go for only a few months or weeks and enrol in a Japanese program, I recommend it as one of the most effective ways to make progress to Japanese fluently. These days there are lots of small colleges that do short Japanese courses for quite a reasonable price. Some of them will also help you with visa applications and a place to stay.

So, if you haven't, go to Japan my friend!



6. Extra Japanese Fluency Strategies and Mindset



Let me finish this guide with a few more observations, strategies and mindsets that might help you to achieve your goal of learning to speak Japanese fluently.

It's about consistency, not intensity

If you go to the gym on Monday and exercise for 10 hours, you won't get fit. It's much better to exercise a little everyday over the long term. In the same way, you want to study and use Japanese on a regular basis.



Don't just study Japanese, USE Japanese

Of course you have to lay the groundwork and study Japanese regularly. However you also need to get out there and use it in real life. Always ask yourself, what will I be able to **do** if I study a particular lesson rather than trying to randomly cram words. This is also why you need to make Japanese friends if you haven't!

Japanese Grammar is essential, but limited

When you start out in Japanese you have to study grammar to give you a framework to use to construct your own basic sentences. However, the more advanced you become, the less you will be able to rely on your textbook to learn natural patterns of speech. So get as much real speaking and listening practice as you can to pick up the real Japanese not in your textbooks.

Learn the culture behind the words

One thing I wished I had learned earlier was to have a deeper understanding of the culture behind the grammar and vocabulary I was learning. Learning more about Japanese culture gives you a much deeper understanding of the language and will make you a much better speaker.

For example, understanding different levels of politeness in Japanese will give you a really good insight into the culture and make your Japanese sound more natural.

Don't be the foreigner who can speak fluent Japanese but just doesn't "get it" and offends everyone. That's called KY or Kuuki Yomei – someone who literally can't "read the air" and is culturally unaware. You have been warned!



Make you studies fun!

This is kind of obvious but it's worth saying. You have to make your studies fun, engaging and relevant to your interests. Don't get too serious, have fun and good luck!

And if that doesn't work, watch this Japanese fisherman motivate you!



Hi, this is Alex, the creator of Learn Japanese Pod. Thanks for downloading these show notes, I hope you find them useful. If you need any help with your Japanese or have any questions or comments please drop me a line at info@learnjapanesepod.com

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Enjoy!

Alex