

COUNTING IN JAPANESE

By Tofugu.com

世界のナベアツ写真集
3の倍数と3がつくページだけ
アホになります

That guy on the right is "nabeatsu." He's a comedian who just...counts. If you haven't checked him out, definitely look it up on Youtube!

Why is it so difficult to count in Japanese? one word: Counters

In English, counting is pretty easy. We just say "one dog," or "two bottles." In Japanese, though, it's a lot more difficult. Sure, counting from one to ten is pretty nice, but after that, you have to learn the counters for all sorts of things...from small animals to flat things to people to cars and machines. It can definitely get confusing, but hopefully this e-book will help you! If you enjoyed this e-book, and found it helpful, maybe you would consider [subscribing to our RSS feed?](#)



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Basic Counting

1-10

Counting 1-10 all on its own is pretty basic. It's good to memorize these before you go into learning the other counters, as you'll notice a lot of similarities between 1-10 and all the counters!

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
一	いち	ichi	one
二	に	ni	two
三	さん	san	three
四	し/よん	shi/yon	four
五	ご	go	five
六	ろく	roku	six
七	しち/なな	shichi/nana	seven
八	はち	hachi	eight
九	く/きゅう	ku/kyuu	nine
十	じゅう	juu	ten

Days of the month

1-31

The first ten days of the month are really strange, and require you to memorize them. After that, it's just the raw number (see above) plus "nichi," except for a few exceptions. 14 is juu-yokka, 24 is nijuu-yokka, and 20 is hatsu-ka. Let's look at the first ten, for now though:

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 日	ついたち	tsuitachi	the 1st
2 日	ふつか	futsuka	the 2nd
3 日	みっか	mikka	the 3rd
4 日	よっか	yokka	the 4th
5 日	いつか	itsuka	the 5th
6 日	むいか	muika	the 6th
7 日	なのか	nanoka	the 7th
8 日	ようか	youka	the 8th
9 日	こののか	kokonoka	the 9th
10 日	とおか	tooka	the 10th
11 日	じゅういちにち	juu-ichi-nichi	the 11th

Hours / Time

1-10

Hours are pretty easy, you just add the number before “ji,” which means “hour” in this context. There are a few exceptions, though, so take an extra hard look at 4, 7, and 9!

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 時	いちじ	ichi-ji	1 o'clock
2 時	にじ	ni-ji	2 o'clock
3 時	さんじ	san-ji	3 o'clock
4 時	よじ	yo-ji	4 o'clock
5 時	ごじ	go-ji	5 o'clock
6 時	ろくじ	roku-ji	6 o'clock
7 時	しちじ	shichi-ji	7 o'clock
8 時	はちじ	hachi-ji	8 o'clock
9 時	くじ	ku-ji	9 o'clock
1 0 時	じゅうじ	juu-ji	10 o'clock

Minutes / Time

1-10

For minutes, the counter is a little more difficult than hours. If you learn the first ten, you can use the same patterns to know how to say 11 (minutes) on. You just have to memorize which ones end with pun, and which one end with bun. Get to it!

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1分	いっぷん	ippun	1 minute
2分	にふん	nifun	2 minutes
3分	さんぷん	sanpun	3 minutes
4分	よんぷん	yonpun	4 minutes
5分	ごふん	gofun	5 minutes
6分	ろっぷん	roppun	6 minutes
7分	ななふん	nanafun	7 minutes
8分	はっぷん	happun	8 minutes
9分	きゅうふん	kyuufun	9 minutes
10分	じゅっぷん	juppun	10 minutes

Age / Years old

1-10

Thank goodness, finally something straight forward. There's only one exception here, and that's 20. It'll be at the bottom of the list.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 歳	いっさい	issai	1 year old
2 歳	にさい	nisai	2 years old
3 歳	さんさい	sansai	3 years old
4 歳	よんさい	yonsai	4 years old
5 歳	ごさい	gosai	5 years old
6 歳	ろくさい	rokusai	6 years old
7 歳	ななさい	nanasai	7 years old
8 歳	はっさい	hassai	8 years old
9 歳	きゅうさい	kyuusai	9 years old
10 歳	じゅうさい	juusai	10 years old
20 歳	はたち	hatachi	20 years old

People

1-10

If you want to count the amount of people, you would use this counter. How many people are here? Oh, 3-nin! Check out the first two, they are especially strange.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1人	ひとり	hitori	1 person
2人	ふたり	futari	2 people
3人	さんにん	sannin	3 people
4人	よにん	yonin	4 people
5人	ごにん	gonin	5 people
6人	ろくにん	rokunin	6 people
7人	しちにん	shichinin	7 people
8人	はちにん	hachinin	8 people
9人	きゅうにん	kyuunin	9 people
10人	じゅうにん	juunin	10 people

Long, Cylindrical Objects

1-10

Here's where counting in Japanese gets a little strange. By "Long, Cylindrical Objects," I mean things like trees, pens, bottles, chopsticks, lets, fingers, pencils, etc. Let's take a look at how you count these things.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 本	いっぽん	ippon	1 LCO
2 本	にほん	nihon	2 LCO
3 本	さんぽん	sanbon	3 LCO
4 本	よんほん	yonhon	4 LCO
5 本	ごほん	gohon	5 LCO
6 本	ろっぽん	roppon	6 LCO
7 本	ななほん	nanahon	7 LCO
8 本	はっぽん	happon	8 LCO
9 本	きゅうほん	kyuuhon	9 LCO
10 本	じゅうぽん	juppon	10 LCO

Flat, Thin Objects

1-10

Flat, Thin objects are things like plates, paper, stamps, cloth, boards, tickets, sheets, shirts, etc.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 枚	いちまい	ichimai	1 FTO
2 枚	にまい	nimai	2 FTO
3 枚	さんまい	sanmai	3 FTO
4 枚	よんまい	yonmai	4 FTO
5 枚	ごまい	gomai	5 FTO
6 枚	ろくまい	rokumai	6 FTO
7 枚	ななまい	nanamai	7 FTO
8 枚	はちまい	hachimai	8 FTO
9 枚	きゅうまい	kyuumai	9 FTO
1 0 枚	じゅうまい	juumai	10 FTO

Bound Objects

1-10

Usually these will be things like books, magazines, etc. I'm not sure if an e-book would count though... hmmm.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 冊	いっさつ	issatsu	1 BO
2 冊	にさつ	nisatsu	2 BO
3 冊	さんさつ	sansatsu	3 BO
4 冊	よんさつ	yonsatsu	4 BO
5 冊	ごさつ	gosatsu	5 BO
6 冊	ろくさつ	rokusatsu	6 BO
7 冊	ななさつ	nanasatsu	7 BO
8 冊	はっさつ	hassatsu	8 BO
9 冊	きゅうさつ	kyuusatsu	9 BO
10 冊	じゅうさつ	jussatsu	10 BO

Small Animals

1-10

Did you know you have to use a special counter for counting small animals (though birds have their own counter, which is “wa”). Big animals, on the other hand, are “tou.” Small animals included in this list are insects, fish, cats, dogs, etc. So yes, a “tofugu” is a “hiki!” One exception is rabbits, which get the “bird” counter...because of their ears.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 匹	いっぴき	ippiki	1 animals
2 匹	にひき	nihiki	2 animals
3 匹	さんびき	sanbiki	3 animals
4 匹	よんひき	yonhiki	4 animals
5 匹	ごひき	gohiki	5 animals
6 匹	ろっぴき	roppiki	6 animals
7 匹	ななひき	nanahiki	7 animals
8 匹	はっぴき	happiki	8 animals
9 匹	きゅうひき	kyuuhiki	9 animals
10 匹	じゅうひき	juppiki	10 animals

Number of Times

1-10

How many times have you read this? How many times did you hit him? How many times did you run around the track? All these questions and more are answered using this counter. Another option is to use the counter “do,” but we’ll be covering “kai” today.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1回	いっかい	ikkai	1 time
2回	にかい	nikai	2 times
3回	さんかい	sankai	3 times
4回	よんかい	yonkai	4 times
5回	ごかい	gokai	5 times
6回	ろっかい	rokkai	6 times
7回	ななかい	nanakai	7 times
8回	はっかい	hakkai	8 times
9回	きゅうかい	kyuukai	9 times
10回	じゅうかい	jukkai	10 times

Small & Compact Objects

1-10

Often times, these small compact objects will be round. Besides that, it's pretty hard to put a finger on what these things are. Just think small and compact. Things like balls, meatballs, rocks, etc.

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1 個	いっこ	ikko	1 SCO
2 個	にこ	niko	2 SCO
3 個	さんこ	sanko	3 SCO
4 個	よんこ	yonko	4 SCO
5 個	ごこ	goko	5 SCO
6 個	ろっこ	rokko	6 SCO
7 個	ななこ	nanako	7 SCO
8 個	はっこ	hakko	8 SCO
9 個	きゅうこ	kyuuko	9 SCO
10 個	じゅっこ	jukko	10 SCO

Things that don't have special counters

1-10

Even though it seems like there's counters for everything, thankfully there is a way to count things that don't have counters (or things that have such rare and ridiculous counters that Japanese people don't bother learning them).

漢字	ひらがな	romaji	meaning
1つ	ひとつ	hitotsu	1
2つ	ふたつ	futatsu	2
3つ	みっつ	mittsu	3
4つ	よっつ	yottsu	4
5つ	いつつ	itsutsu	5
6つ	むっつ	muttsu	6
7つ	ななつ	nanatsu	7
8つ	やっつ	yattsu	8
9つ	ここのつ	kokonotsu	9
10	とお	too	10

List of (somewhat) Ridiculous Counters

(this list comes from wikipedia, so be weary)

There's so much more besides the ones I mentioned. Here's a list of ones you won't see as often

Pronunciation	Japanese	Use
ba	場	Scene of a play
bai	倍	Multiples, -fold as in "twofold"
ban	晩	Nights (see also: ya)
ban	番	Sports matches
bi	尾	Small fish and shrimps (used in the fish trade; most people say
bu	部	Copies of a magazine or newspaper, or other packets of papers
bun	文	Sentences
byō	秒	Seconds
byōshi	拍子	Musical beats
chaku	着	Suits of clothing (see also: mai)
chō	挺	Guns, sticks of ink, palanquins, rickshaws, violins
chō	丁	Tools, scissors, saws, trousers, pistols, cakes of tofu, town blocks,
chō	町	Town blocks
dai	代	Generations, periods, reigns
dai	台	Cars, bicycles, machines, mechanical devices, household
danraku	段落	Paragraphs
do, also tabi	度	Occurrences, number of times, degrees of temperature or
fuku, puku	服	Bowls of matcha (powdered green tea); packets or doses of
fuku, puku	幅	Hanging scrolls (kakejiku)
fun, pun	分	Minutes
furi	振	Swords
gakkyū	学級	Classes (in pre-university education)
gatsu, also	月	Months of the year. Month-long periods when read tsuki (see
go	語	Words
gon, also koto	言	Words
gu	具	Suits of armour, sets of furniture
gyō	行	Lines of text
ku	句	Haiku, senryū

Pronunciation	Japanese	Use
kuchi	口	(Bank) accounts, donations (口 means "opening" or "entrance")
kumi	組	Groups, a pair of people (twins, a husband and a wife, dancers,
kurasu	クラス	School classes
kyaku	脚	Desks, chairs, long-stemmed glasses
kyaku	客	Pairs of cup and saucer
kyoku	曲	Pieces of music
kyoku	局	Board game matches (chess, Igo, Shogi, Mahjong); radio
mai	枚	Thin, flat objects, sheets of paper, photographs, plates, articles
maki or kan	巻	Rolls, scrolls, kan for volumes of book
maku	幕	Theatrical acts
mei	名	People (polite) (名 means "name")
men	面	Mirrors, boards for board games (chess, Igo, Shogi), stages of
mon	門	Cannons
mon	問	Questions
nen	年	Years, school years (grades); not years of age
nichi	日	Days of the month (but see table of exceptions below)
nin	人	People (but see table of exceptions below)
ninmae	人前	Food portions (without exceptions, unlike nin above)
pēji	ページ, 頁	Pages
rei	礼	Bows during worship at a shrine
rin	輪	Wheels, Flowers
ryō	両	Railway cars
sai	才 or 歳	Years of age
sao	棹	Chests of drawers, flags
satsu	冊	Books
seki	席	Seats, Rakugo shows, (drinking) parties
seki	隻	Ships
shina	品	Parts of a meal, courses (see also: hin)
sha	社	used for businesses, i.e. 会社

Pronunciation	Japanese	Use
shiki	式	Sets of things, such as documents or furniture
shō	勝	Wins (sports bouts)
shu	首	Tankas
shū	週	Weeks
shurui or shu	種類 or 種	Kinds, species
soku	足	Pairs of footwear, pairs of socks, stockings, and tabis.
tai	体	Images, person's remains, dolls
tawara	俵	Bags of rice
teki	滴	Drops of liquid
ten	点	Points, dots
tō	頭	Large animals, cattle, elephants (頭 means "head")
tōri	通り	Combinations, puzzle solutions
tsū	通	Letters
tsūwa	通話	Telephone calls (see also: hon)
toki	時	Time periods, a sixth of either day or night (in the traditional,
tsubo	坪	Commonly used unit of area equal to 3.3 square metres.
wa	羽	Birds, rabbits* (because of their ears); 羽 means "feather" or
wa	把	Bundles
ya	夜	Nights (see also: ban')
zen	膳	Pairs of chopsticks; bowls of rice

Want to know more about counters? “Hrmm, maybe?”

There are more counters out there, as well as several great resources that can help you with that. Here’s a few places you can learn more about counters:

[Tae Kim’s Guide to Japanese Counter Page](#)

[About’s Counter’s Page](#)

[Wikipedia’s Japanese Counters Page](#)

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