

Hello and welcome to Naruhodo Japan, the podcast for learning about the language and culture of Japan from a Nikkei perspective. I am your host, Mariko.

ようこそ。 「なるほどJAPAN」が^{はじ}始まります。 日系人の^{にっけいじん}観^{かん}点^{てん}から日本語と日本の^{にほんご}文化を^{にほん}学^ぶぶためのポッドキャストです。ホストのマリコです。

In this episode we are going to cover how to count in Japanese. There are two things you need to know about counting in Japanese. The first thing is to learn the basic numbers such as 1, 2, 3 and the second thing you need to know is for when you are counting people or objects. Just as you would count items as slices, sheets, or pieces in English, you would do the same in Japanese but what word you associate with counting the objects is much more strict in Japanese. Counters is the term for words such as slices, sheets, and pieces.

Basic counting in Japanese is quite simple. The most important things to learn are the numbers 1-10 and then higher numbers such as 100, 1000, 10000, and so forth. Once you have these numbers down, you can create the other numbers by using math, much like Roman numerals. For example, to say 20 in Japanese, you say 2-10. ($2 * 10 = 20$) 25 would be 2-10-5. ($(2 * 10) + 5 = 25$)

Counting

How to say the numbers 0 and 1-10.

0*	rei	零	れい
1	ichi	一	いち
2	ni	二	に
3	san	三	さん
4**	shi / yon	四	し / よん
5	go	五	ご
6	roku	六	ろく
7**	shichi / nana	七	しち / なな
8	hachi	八	はち
9**	kyuu / ku	九	きゅう / く
10	jyuu	十	じゅう

These numbers in a row 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, quickly like that in Japanese is: ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, ku, jyuu.

Items to note:

*0 is rei in Japanese but it may also be referred to as maru, which means “circle”. When you read numbers in a sequence, such as a phone number, one is more likely to say maru. This is akin to referring to 0 as the letter O in English.

**There are two ways to say the numbers 4, 7, and 9. Which way depends on the context and conjugation.

How to say the numbers 11-20.

11	jyuu-ichi	十一	じゅういち
12	jyuu-ni	十二	じゅうに
13	jyuu-san	十三	じゅうさん
14	jyuu-shi / jyuu-yon	十四	じゅうし / じゅうよん
15	jyuu-go	十五	じゅうご
16	jyuu-roku	十六	じゅうろく
17	jyuu-shichi / jyuu-nana	十七	じゅうしち / じゅうなな
18	jyuu-hachi	十八	じゅうはち
19	jyuu-kyuu / jyuu-ku	十九	じゅうきゅう / じゅうく
20	ni-jyuu	二十	にじゅう

So as I stated already, when you're making a number past 10, you just say 10 + the number after it for 11-19 so jyuu-ichi, jyuu-ni, jyuu-san, so ichi, ni, san; 1, 2, 3. 10-1, jyuu-ichi. 10-2, jyuu-ni. 10-3, jyuu-san.

Just to make sure you understand the concept of how to create the numbers past 10, let's go over how to say the numbers 21-30.

21	ni-jyuu-ichi	二十一	さんじゅういち
22	ni-jyuu-ni	二十二	さんじゅうに
23	ni-jyuu-san	二十三	さんじゅうさん
24	ni-jyuu-shi / ni-jyuu-yon	二十四	さんじゅうし / さんじゅうよん
25	ni-jyuu-go	二十五	さんじゅうご
26	ni-jyuu-roku	二十六	さんじゅうろく
27	ni-jyuu-shichi / ni-jyuu-nana	二十七	さんじゅうしち / さんじゅうなな
28	ni-jyuu-hachi	二十八	さんじゅうはち
29	ni-jyuu-kyuu / ni-jyuu-ku	二十九	さんじゅうきゅう / さんじゅうく
30	san-jyuu	三十	さんにじゅう

Now that you are starting to understand the basics of counting, I will list the multiples of 10 from 40 through 100.

40	yon-jyuu	四十	よんじゅう
50	go-jyuu	五十	ごじゅう
60	roku-jyuu	六十	ろくじゅう
70	nana-jyuu	七十	ななじゅう
80	hachi-jyuu	八十	はちじゅう
90	kyuu-jyuu	九十	きゅうじゅう
100	hyaku	百	ひゃく

So that you get a sense of how to say numbers beyond 100, here are various examples of numbers from 101 to 199.

101	hyaku-ichi
118	hyaku-jyuu-hachi
123	hyaku-ni-jyuu-san

- 136 hyaku-san-jyuu-roku
- 142 hyaku-yon-jyuu-ni
- 157 hyaku-go-jyuu-nana or hyaku-go-jyuu-shichi
- 164 hyaku-roku-jyuu-yon or hyaku-roku-jyuu-shi
- 170 hyaku-nana-jyuu
- 185 hyaku-hachi-jyuu-go
- 199 hyaku-kyuu-jyuu-kyuu or hyaku-kyuu-jyuu-ku

Saying the multiples of 100 requires a bit of conjugation. 100 is hyaku and if you remember from an earlier episode, the letters ha-hi-fu-he-ho はひふへほ can have a maru ° or ten-ten " placed on them to create pa-pi-pu-pe-po ぱぴぷぺぽ and ba-bi-bu-be-bo ばびぶべぼ respectfully. Therefore, hyaku ひゃく may become pyaku ぴゃく or byaku びゃく when conjugated. Also, in some conjugations a small tsu つ is added.

Here are the multiples of 100 up to 1000.

200	ni-hyaku	二百	にひゃく
300	san-byaku	三百	さんびゃく
400	yon-hyaku	四百	よんひゃく
500	go-hyaku	五百	ごひゃく
600	ro-ppyaku	六百	ろっぴゃく
700	nana-hyaku	七百	ななひゃく
800	ha-ppyaku	八百	はっぴゃく
900	kyuu-hyaku	九百	きゅうひゃく
1000	sen	千	せん

Just as 100 hyaku may be conjugated with maru or ten ten, here are the conjugations to remember for 1000 sen.

2000	ni-sen	二千	にせん
3000	san-zen	三千	さんぜん
4000	yon-sen	四千	よんせん
5000	go-sen	五千	ごせん
6000	roku-sen	六千	ろくせん
7000	nana-sen	七千	ななせん
8000	ha-ssen	八千	はっせん
9000	kyuu-sen	九千	きゅうせん

Counting numbers in Japanese is pretty simple up until this point with the hardest thing to remember being the conjugation in my opinion. Many countries are using the metric system as the standard method of measurement and Japan does as well. The metric system is based on multiples of 10 and 1000. However, counting in higher numbers in Japanese is based on an earlier system of multiples of 10,000. In the metric system, you would put a comma at the thousand and one million marks, such as 1,000 for one thousand and 1,000,000 for one million. (Or some countries may use a decimal point instead of a comma.) However, in the Japanese method of ten thousands, the comma is placed as such: 1,0000. This can create some confusion

when trying to say numbers higher than 10,000. For example, 100,000 in Japanese is 10-10,000. It is NOT 100-1000. I repeat, 100,000 in Japanese is 10-10,000.

Here are the major numbers from 10,000 to 100,000,000.

10,000	ichi-man	一万	いちまん
100,000	jyuu-man	十万	じゅうまん
1,000,000	hyaku-man	百万	ひゃくまん
10,000,000*	sen-man / i-ssen-man	(一)千万	せんまん / いっせんまん
100,000,000	ichi-oku	一億	いちおく

*For 10,000,000, sometimes it is read as i-ssen-man with the kanji for 1 placed in front.

Counters

Now that you know how to count in Japanese up to 100,000,000, let's go over counters so that you can count various objects and people. The Japanese word for counters is 助数詞^{じょすうし}. To count an object using the wrong counter is a great faux pas in Japanese but as a non-native speaker you are likely to be forgiven for your mistakes. (An example of a counter faux pas in English would be to count sheets of paper as slices of paper.) There are so many counters that it is quite overwhelming. To be honest, there are so many counters that even native Japanese do not know them all. We will go over the most commonly used counters that you are likely to use.

Earlier I stated that there are two ways to say the numbers 4, 7, and 9. That is true for most of the time but there are a few counters for which there is another way to say most of the numbers 1-10.

For the conjugation of counters, please note that some people do say things a bit differently. I try to list what I most commonly heard among family, friends, and television programs but I just want you to be aware that some people speak differently. One example is the that the word 10 may be conjugated as じゅう or じつ, depending on the counter and person speaking.

Tsu っ counter

This may be considered the default counter and it is with this counter that you say the numbers alternatively. Whenever you are unsure which counter to use, just stick with っ and people will understand you. If っ is unacceptable for the object you are referring to, someone might correct you and let you know which is the proper counter to use.

How many?	ikutsu	幾つ	いくつ
1	hitso-tsu	一つ	ひとつ
2	futa-tsu	二つ	ふたつ
3	mi-ttsu	三つ	みっつ
4	yo-ttsu	四つ	よっつ
5	itsu-tsu	五つ	いっつ
6	mu-ttsu	六つ	むっつ
7	nana-tsu	七つ	ななつ

8	ya-ttsu	八つ	やっつ
9	kokono-tsu	九つ	ここのつ
10*	tou	十	とお

*Please note that for counting ten, “tou” does not have -tsu attached to it.

The つ counter ends there so if you have more than 10 items, you should use another counter, such as 個, which is acceptable in many situations.

Ko 個 counter

This counter is much like つ in that it is a general use counter but please note that it is mainly used for small objects.

How many?	nanko?	何個	なんこ
1	i-kko	一個	いっこ
2	ni-ko	二個	にこ
3	san-ko	三個	さんこ
4	yon-ko	四個	よんこ
5	go-ko	五個	ごこ
6	ro-kko	六個	ろっこ
7	nana-ko	七個	ななこ
8	ha-kko	八個	はっこ
9	kyuu-ko	九個	きゅうこ
10	ji-kko	十個	じっこ

As an example of native Japanese not knowing which counter to use, let me tell you of when I was a kid living in Japan and learning to speak the language. One time when I went to McDonald's, I asked for one hamburger, ハンバーガー一つ. The employee repeated my order but changed the counter, ハンバーガー一個. The next time I visited the same McDonald's, I wanted to order a hamburger using the correct counter so I asked for ハンバーガー一個. This time the employee repeated my order, ハンバーガー一つ.

Hon 本 counter

This counter uses the kanji for “book” but it's not the counter used for counting books. Rather, it is used for counting long, skinny objects such as pens and pencils.

How many?	nanbon	何本	なんぼん
1	i-ppon	一本	いっぽん
2*	ni-hon	二本	にほん
3	san-bon	三本	さんぼん
4	yon-hon	四本	よんほん
5	go-hon	五本	ごほん
6	ro-ppon	六本	ろっぽん

7	nana-hon	七本	ななほん
8	ha-ppon	八本	はっぽん
9	kyuu-hon	九本	きゅうほん
10	ji-ppon	十本	じっぽん

*You may have noticed that the way to count “2 pencils” is the same word for “Japan” in Japanese. Therefore, kanji and context is very important to know the different between 2 pencils 二本 and Japan 日本.

Example:

- One pencil is sufficient. えんぴつ一本で十分。^{じゅうぶん}

Satsu 冊 counter

This is the counter for books and magazines but please note that there are other counters for magazines as well that someone might use.

How many?	nansatsu	何冊	なんさつ
1	i-ssatsu	一冊	いっさつ
2	ni-satsu	二冊	にさつ
3	san-satsu	三冊	さんさつ
4	yon-satsu	四冊	よんさつ
5	go-satsu	五冊	ごさつ
6	roku-satsu	六冊	ろくさつ
7	nana-satsu	七冊	ななさつ
8	ha-ssatsu	八冊	はっさつ
9	kyuu-satsu	九冊	きゅうさつ
10	ji-ssatsu	十冊	じっさつ

Example:

- This month I read two books. 今月本を2冊読みました。^{こんげつほん} ^よ

Mai 枚 counter

This counter is for flat objects such as paper, CDs, and plates.

How many?	nan-mai	何枚	なんまい
1	ichi-mai	一枚	いちまい
2	ni-mai	二枚	にまい
3	san-mai	三枚	さんまい
4	yon-mai	四枚	よんまい
5	go-mai	五枚	ごまい
6	roku-mai	六枚	ろくまい
7	nana-mai	七枚	ななまい

8	hachi-mai	八枚	はちまい
9	kyuu-mai	九枚	きゅうまい
10	jyuu-mai	十枚	じゅうまい

Example:

- I was only able to buy 3 concert tickets. コンサートのチケットを三枚しか買えな
かったです。

Hai 杯 counter

This counter is for bowls of rice and drinks, such as a glass of water or a cup of coffee.

How many?	nan-bai	何杯	なんばい
1	i-ppai	一杯	いっぱい
2	ni-hai	二杯	にはい
3	san-bai	三杯	さんばい
4	yon-hai	四杯	よんはい
5	go-hai	五杯	ごはい
6	ro-ppai	六杯	ろっぱい
7	nana-hai	七杯	ななはい
8	ha-ppai	八杯	はっぱい
9	kyuu-hai	九杯	きゅうはい
10	ji-ppai	十杯	じっぱい

Example:

- One cup of coffee please. コーヒー（を）一杯ねがお願いします。

* The particle を may be omitted in casual speech.

Hiki 匹 counter

This counter is for smaller animals and fish, such as when counting sheep to fall asleep, except that Japanese don't actually count sheep to fall asleep. You could get away with using this counter for all animals until others correct you with another counter for specific animals.

How many?	nanbiki	何匹	なんびき
1	i-ppiki	一匹	いっぴき
2	ni-hiki	二匹	にひき
3	san-biki	三匹	さんびき
4	yon-hiki	四匹	よんひき
5	go-hiki	五匹	ごひき
6	ro-ppiki	六匹	ろっぴき
7	nana-hiki	七匹	ななひき
8	ha-ppiki	八匹	はっぴき
9	kyuu-hiki	九匹	きゅうひき

10 ji-ppiki 十匹 じっぴき

Example:

- I own 6 cats and 2 dogs as well. 猫 (を) 六匹と犬 (を) 二匹も買っています。

* The particle を may be omitted in casual speech.

Tou 頭 counter

This counter uses the kanji for “head” but it’s for counting larger animals such as cows, elephants, and whales. One might think of it in English as heads of cattle.

How many?	nantou	何頭	なんとう
1	i-ttou	一頭	いっとう
2	ni-tou	二頭	にとう
3	san-tou	三頭	さんとう
4	yon-tou	四頭	よんとう
5	go-tou	五頭	ごとう
6	roku-tou	六頭	ろくとう
7	nana-tou	七頭	ななとう
8	ha-ttou	八頭	はっとう
9	kyuu-tou	九頭	きゅうとう
10	jyuu-ttou	十頭	じゅうとう

Example:

- I saw 2 elephants at the zoo. 動物園で像を二頭見ました。

Wa 羽 counter

This counter uses the kanji for “wings” and thus appropriately it is used for counting birds, however it may also be used for counting rabbits though 匹 is more common for rabbits, especially when counting pets.

How many?	nanba	何羽	なんば
1	ichi-wa	一羽	いちわ
2	ni-wa	二羽	にわ
3	san-ba	三羽	さんば
4	yon-wa	四羽	よんわ
5	go-wa	五羽	ごわ
6	ro-ppa	六羽	ろっぱ
7	nana-wa	七羽	ななわ
8	ha-ppa	八羽	はっぱ
9	kyuu-wa	九羽	きゅうわ
10	ji-ppa	十羽	じっぱ

Example:

- In that movie there are numerous crows. あの映画えいがにからすが何羽もいます。

Kai 回 counter

This counter is for counting the number of times that something occurs, such as falling down three times or going to the park twice.

How many?	nankai	何回	なんかい
1	i-kkai	一回	いっかい
2	ni-kai	二回	にかい
3	san-kai	三回	さんかい
4	yon-kai	四回	よんかい
5	go-kai	五回	ごかい
6	ro-kkai	六回	ろっかい
7	nana-kai	七回	ななかい
8	ha-kkai	八回	はっかい
9	kyuu-kai	九回	きゅうかい
10	ji-kkai	十回	じっかい

Example:

- I haven't even listened to that album once. あのアルバムをまだ一回もき聞いてない。

Kai 階 counter

This is the same counter as the previous one, but this one has a different kanji. It is for the number of floors or stories in a building.

Example:

- The office is on the 13th floor. 事務所じむしょは十三階にあります。

Dai 台 counter

This counter is for large objects such as cars and household appliances.

How many?	nandai	何台	だんだい
1	ichi-dai	一台	いちだい
2	ni-dai	二台	にだい
3	san-dai	三台	さんだい
4	yon-dai	四台	よんだい
5	go-dai	五台	ごだい
6	roku-dai	六台	ろくだい
7	nana-dai	七台	ななだい
8	hachi-dai	八台	はちだい
9	kyuu-dai	九台	きゅうだい

10 jyuu-dai 十台 じゅうだい

Example:

- He used to have 7 cars before but now he only has 2. 彼は前に^{かれ まえ くるま}車七台もあつたのに^{いま}今は二台しかない。

Ten 点 counter

This counter is for points, such as points on a test or points in games.

How many?	nanten	何点	なんてん
1	i-tten	一点	いってん
2	ni-ten	二点	にてん
3	san-ten	三点	さんてん
4	yon-ten	四点	よんてん
5	go-ten	五点	ごてん
6	roku-ten	六点	ろくてん
7	nana-ten	七点	ななてん
8	ha-tten	八点	はってん
9	kyuu-ten	九点	きゅうてん
10	ji-tten	十点	じってん

Example:

- It is difficult to score 100% on the exam. ^{しけん}試験で^と百点を取るのは^{むずか}難しいです。

Sai 歳／才 counter

This counter is for someone's age or how many years old they are. There are two possible kanji and usually the simplified one (才) is used by children since it has less strokes and is easier to write.

How many?	nansai	何歳	なんさい	or	ikutsu	幾つ	いくつ
1	i-ssai	一才	いっさい				
2	ni-sai	二才	にさい				
3	san-sai	三才	さんさい				
4	yon-sai	四才	よんさい				
5	go-sai	五才	ごさい				
6	roku-sai	六才	ろくさい				
7	nana-sai	七才	ななさい				
8	ha-ssai	八才	はっさい				
9	kyuu-sai	九才	きゅうさい				
10	ji-ssai	十才	じっさい				
		(the ages continue this way with one exception)					
20	hata-chi	二十歳	はたち				

[*Please note: a few days after this episode was published, I realized that when talking about the sai counter (how many years old someone is), that there is one age where the conjugation is not obvious. In fact, if you're not Japanese you would probably not know that 20 years old is not 20-sai but hatachi. Since I realized this after the fact, it's not in the audio podcast but is noted in the transcript.]

Examples:

- How old are you? 何歳ですか。幾つですか。
- I turned 45 this year. 今年で四五歳^{ことし}になりました。

Mei 名 vs. Nin 人 counter

Both counters are for counting people but they are used for different contexts. Mei 名 is the kanji for “name” and nin 人 is the kanji for “people”. Generally, 名 is used when being polite or for smaller amounts of people whereas 人 is used for larger amounts of people or speaking neutrally. For remembering when to use which, you may think of it as 名 speaking directly to someone vs. 人 speaking indirectly. Another way to put it is if it would be possible to name most people in the group then use 名 but if there are too many people to name them individually, then use 人.

Example: You go to a restaurant and the server asks how many are in your party, 何名ですか。 You give a report on a city and list the population as being 17,065人.

The other important thing to remember about counting people is that when there are only one or two people and you use the 人 counter, it is read differently.

How many?	nanmei	何名	なんめい	or	nannin	何人	なんにん
1	ichi-mei	一名	いちめい		hito-ri	一人	ひとり
2	ni-mei	二名	にめい		futa-ri	二人	ふたり
3	san-mei	三名	さんめい		san-nin	三人	さんにん
4	yon-mei	四名	よんめい		yo-nin	四人	よにん
5	go-mei	五名	ごめい		go-nin	五人	ごにん
6	roku-mei	六名	ろくめい		roku-nin	六人	ろくにん
7	nana-mei	七名	ななめい		shichi-nin	七人	しちにん
8	hachi-mei	八名	はちめい		hachi-nin	八人	はちにん
9	kyuu-mei	九名	きゅうめい		kyuu-nin	九人	きゅうにん
10	jyuu-mei	十名	じゅうめい		jyuu-nin	十人	じゅうにん

Alright, that's enough for this episode. I know that was a lot of information to digest. Learning to count in Japanese is easy but the counters will take more time to sink in. At least with these basics though you should be able to state your age and count how many various objects you have

around the house. In the next episode we'll cover dates and time to build upon your new counting skills so please practice those numbers.

Kaa-chan Corner is again on hiatus for this episode as my mother is still away in Japan for a funeral. However, she should return to the country soon so if she's up to it then she may be back for the next episode.

Thank you for listening to Naruhodo Japan and if you liked this episode or have any questions, please leave feedback on the website naruhodojapan.com. Don't forget that transcripts are available on the website. Please tune in again for the next episode. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!