

Learning Japanese Kanji

Introduction

One of the most challenging aspects of learning Japanese is learning the meaning and readings (pronunciations) of the kanji. Despite my best efforts to come up with a system that would make this easier, I have concluded that it just takes memorization. (The closest I came to a system had already been developed by Heisig (1977).) I am still not sure why the Japanese have organized the approximately 2,000 kanji that are required in their school system in the way that they have. Some of the first grade kanji, for example, involve meanings that would seem to be well beyond the understanding (or the needs for communication) of first graders. Instead, I have ordered the kanji into what I believe are the 50 most used words (in any language), the next 100 most used words, etc.

My Microsoft PowerPoint shows are designed to help you recognize, understand, and pronounce the 1,000 most essential Japanese kanji. There are shows for learning the kanji and shows for testing your progress. The kanji are arranged in order of frequency of use. Each level introduces many new kanji, as shown in the following table:

Level	Learn new	Test cumulative	Sublevels	Test Slides /Show
1	50	50		100
2	100	150		300
3	150	300	A,B	300
4	150	450	A,B,C	300
5	150	600	A,B,C,D	300
6	200	800	A,B,C,D,E	300,350(D,E)
7	200	1000	A,B,C,D,E	400

Learning

Learning Level 1 contains the 50 most essential kanji, Learning Level 2 contains the 100 next most essential, etc. There are seven shows for learning the kanji, one for each level. Each of these shows contains only the new kanji. On each slide of the Learning shows you have a kanji, its On and kun readings, and its English meaning. Each slide contains a number, which refers to the kanji number in Henshall (1988). This book is very useful for following up on points of clarification, or on the source and development of the kanji.

Testing

The number of kanji covered in each Testing level is shown in the Test Cumulative column. At each level there are one to five shows (Sublevels) to test the reader on the kanji learned to that point. (The sublevels are for convenience only, to ensure that the resulting files are of manageable size.) There are a total of 21 shows to test On/kun pronunciation and 21 shows to test English meaning. In addition, there is a show to learn and test hiragana and one to learn and test katakana. The reader is urged to select the correct response from three choices, two of which are randomly selected from the other kanji of that level. The following slide then provides the correct response.

To move forward one slide at a time, Left click the mouse, press the Down arrow or the Right arrow, or press Page down on the keyboard. To back up one slide, press the Up arrow, the Left arrow, or Page up. To close the program, press ESC. A pulldown menu of other commands appears if you Right click the mouse. Among the latter are the ability to jump to any slide or to exit the program while leaving it open (Screen/Switch programs).

Downloads

You may download Level 1 and the hiragana and katakana shows from my website at no charge. Cntl-Click on www.flowervalleyconsulting.com/kanji/kanjishokyu.zip . When you are given the option to save or open, use Save As and select a destination. This file can be unzipped using WINZIP or its contents can be played directly using WINZIP. (You'll need a Powerpoint Reader, available free from Microsoft.) Additional levels are available for download, with prices shown in the following table:

Level	Individual	Set	All
2	\$15	\$15	\$75
3	\$20	\$50	
4	\$20		
5	\$20	\$40	
6	\$25		
7	\$25		

Each level, including those of the free shows, contains the Learning shows, the On/kun testing shows and the English testing shows. Email billfkanji@verizon.net for payment and download information.

Qualifications and Caveats

I am a student of the Japanese language but not an expert. As a statistician and consultant, I use the computer a lot. My contribution is the ability to create these programs using the computer and the available literature produced by experts. In defining the order of presentation of the kanji, I have tried to follow the learning patterns of children, the words that I would expect to use most often in any language, and lastly my own personal interests. Others might find different kanji to be of greater use, or might specify a different order. I relied heavily on the reference by Henshall. Any errors are my own. I will correct any that are reported to me (properly referenced) and I will replace the file at no charge.

I am very grateful to my friend and sensei, Yomei Sawanobori (now deceased), who tried to teach me Japanese. His patience was a credit to teachers everywhere.

References: Henshall,KG. *A Guide to Remembering Japanese Characters*. Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland VT, 1988.

Heisig, JW. *Remembering the Kanji, 1 and 2*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu HI, 1977.

William R. Fairweather, PhD., Rockville Maryland, December 2014