

Greetings 1 / 挨拶一

Formality and politeness are essential parts of any language; therefore, greetings are usually the first thing you will learn when studying a new language. Japanese greetings are surprisingly easy to learn and memorize, so let's start right away! Every greeting will be explained by breaking them down into understandable parts.

おはようございます	Ohayou Gozaimasu	Good morning
こんにちは	Konnichi wa	Good afternoon
こんばんは	Konban wa	Good evening
もしもし	Moshimoshi	Hello

"Ohayou Gozaimasu" literally means "it's early" and is one of many idiomatic expressions. It is used from sunrise to about 10 am in the morning. The "o" in the expression is an honorific "o". You will be seeing it a lot in Japanese because it's used in front of a lot of words and expressions to indicate respect. For some words the "o" is optional, but with expressions like this one it would be unthinkable to leave it out. The "hayou" part simply means "fast" or "early". "Gozaimasu" is a very polite form of the copula "to be" and is used in many different expressions. You can say good morning without using the "gozaimasu" part, but only if you're talking to your peers, friends or relatives.

"Konnichi wa" literally means "as for this day" and is used from about 10 am till sun down. "Kon" means right now and "nichi" means "day". "Wa" is a particle which in this case serves as a subject marker. In order to avoid confusing this greeting with the expression "today is" or "as for today" it should always be written in hiragana.

"Konban wa" literally means "as for tonight" and is used from sundown to sometime before sunrise. It pretty much works the same as "Konnichi wa"; the only difference is that "nichi" has been replaced with "ban".

"Moshimoshi" means nothing except for "Hello" and can only be used as a greeting on the phone so you can't use it in person.

In English, we usually say someone's name after a greeting, like "Good morning Frank" or "Good morning sir/madam". In Japanese it sounds better when you say their name (or title) before the greeting. Therefore it would be "Frank-san ohayou gozaimasu" or "Sensei konban wa."

すみません	Sumimasen	Excuse me/Sorry
ごめんなさい	Gomen nasai	Sorry
ごめんください	Gomen kudasai	May I come in?
しつれいします	Shitsureishimasu	Pardon Me

Although these greetings basically mean the same thing, they are used for different things.

“Sumimasen” literally means “it’s settled” or “it’s already happened” and is mainly used as an informal “sorry” or “excuse me”. You can use it to ask someone a question, or excuse yourself when you step on someone’s toe. “Sumanai” or “suman” are different forms of this expression that are popular with kids and young adults.

“Gomen nasai” is a more formal way of saying sorry or excuse me. The “go” in “gomen” uses the same kanji as the honorific “o” used in “ohayou gozaimasu”. Because it’s written as “go” and not “o” you cannot omit it from the expression. “Men” means forgive, but “nasai” means nothing by itself, but paired with a verb it means “please”.

“Gomen kudasai” as you may expect is identical to “Gomen nasai” except for the “kuda” part. “Kudasai” is a common verb meaning “please”, so technically speaking these two expressions means the exact same thing. However, because these are idiomatic expressions they can mean different things. In this case, ‘Gomen Kudasai’ means “May I come in?”. You can use this when you’re entering someone’s room or shop, and is considered to be good manners. You can also use this when knocking on a closed door to ask if someone’s home.

“Shitsureishimasu” is a very long expression that is roughly equivalent to the English “pardon me”. It literally means “please excuse me for this mistake” and is used to excuse yourself before you do something ‘wrong’ like burping or going to the bathroom. “Shitsurei” means impoliteness or discourtesy and the “shimasu” part makes it past tense. You also use this if you want to be pardoned from someone’s company to do something else. This expression is used frequently in social structures where respect is very important such as in the military, police force or politics. In casual conversation it is used much less frequent, but it’s very polite and will leave a good impression on people.

All of these expressions are stand-alone; therefore you don’t need to use a pronoun because that part of the sentence is already understood. In English we say “ I am sorry” or “excuse **me**”, but it’s unnecessary in Japanese because pronouns are omitted very often.

はじめまして	Hajimemashite	Nice to meet you
どうぞよろしく	Douzo yoroshiku	Nice to meet you

These two greetings tend to confuse a lot of people, so I will explain them thoroughly for you. "Hajimemashite" literally means "it has been the first time" and is another idiomatic expression. Now here is where the confusion begins. Most dictionaries and text books will just translate this as "How are you?", however, this is neither right nor wrong. The "hajime" part of the expression indicates that this is a first occurrence, meaning that this is the first time that you meet this person. In American-English, we tend to say "How are you?" to anyone as a greeting. We don't actually inquire about their health, but it's just a standard greeting with little meaning. "Hajimemashite" on the other hand can only be used once during the first meeting with whomever you are talking to. Since in American-English we can say "How are you?" to someone as many times as we like, we can't compare it to "Hajimemashite". So the best translation would be "Nice to meet you for the first time". Of course that's too long for an English greeting, so we can bring it down to "Nice to meet you".

"Douzo yoroshiku" is another troublemaker because a lot of text books don't explain the context. "Douzo" means please and "yoroshiku" means a variety of things but in this case we narrow it down to "well" (as in "good"). This expression is a very humble way of asking someone to treat you nicely. There's no literal equivalent to this in English simply because we don't ask people to treat us good when we first meet them. However, in Japanese it's considered very important.

Now, in modern Japanese, this expression is used differently. The "douzo" part is omitted and "yoroshiku" or "yoroshiku na" have become replies to "Hajimemashite". Let's say that you're meeting your Japanese pen-pal for the first time. You say "Hajimemashite, Jon desu", so he replies "Kaori desu, yoroshiku na." The "Jon desu" and "Kaori desu" simply mean "I'm Jon" and "I'm Kaori". From this example you can see that in casual conversation there is no need to use "douzo yoroshiku" yourself. So, to summarize all this, we've learned that:

- "Douzo yoroshiku" is a polite greeting if the speaker uses it
- "Yoroshiku" is a polite response to "Hajimemashite", when used by the recipient
- "Hajimemashite" is used only during a first encounter and means "Nice to meet you"

Try listening to native Japanese speakers and you will notice how different people use different expressions. It's not always clear which level of politeness to use, so go with the politest version first just to be safe.

さよなら	Sayonara	Goodbye
さようなら	Sayounara	Farewell
またね	Mata ne	See you next time

The final part of this lesson is about saying goodbye. "Sayonara" is probably the most famous and well known Japanese phrase out there so you are probably already familiar with it. "Sayonara" is a general "goodbye" that you use when you're not sure when you will see the other person again. "Sayounara" has an added "u" for dramatic effect, making it equal to the English "farewell" rather than simply "Goodbye".

"Mata" means "again" and "ne" is an agreement seeking particle, roughly the equivalent of phrases such as "Ok" "Right" and "Don't you think?" Therefore we can conclude that there will be another time soon when you meet this person and that is what we use "mata ne" for. It is more casual that "sayonara" and favored by children and young adults. You can also specify a time frame to this phrase, such as "mata ashita ne", which means "See you again tomorrow ok?" or "Mata raishuu ne" which means "See you again next week right?". The most important difference between "sayonara" and "mata ne" is the knowledge of when you will meet again. With "sayonara" we're not sure when this is, but with "mata ne" we have a good idea, and when we add a time frame to our greeting, we narrow it down even more. You cannot use "mata ne" in combination with a specific hour; you can only use it with terms like "tomorrow" or "next week".

This concludes our "Greetings 1" lesson; please check out our [website](#) for more lessons. The last page of this lesson has an overview of the words used in this lesson in both Kanji and Hiragana, for both beginners and intermediate students.

Greetings 1 Vocabulary

Kanji:	Hiragana:	Romaji:	English:
お早うございます	おはようございます	Ohayou Gozaimasu	Good morning
今日は	こんにちは	Konnichi wa	Good afternoon
今晚は	こんばんは	Konban wa	Good evening
もしもし	もしもし	Moshimoshi	Hello (Phone)
済みません	すみません	Sumimasen	Excuse me/Sorry (Inf.)
御免なさい	ごめんなさい	Gomen nasai	Excuse me/Sorry (For.)
御免下さい	ごめんください	Gomen kudasai	May I come in?
始めまして ¹ 初めまして	はじめまして	Hajimemashite	Nice to meet you
どうぞ宜しく	どうぞよろしく	Douzo yoroshiku	Nice to meet you
左様なら	さよなら	Sayonara	Goodbye
左様なら	さようなら	Sayounara	Farewell
又ね	またね	Mata ne	See you next time

¹:始めまして and 初めまして are interchangeable and mean the same thing.

Please note that the honorific "O" is written as "お" when in its "O" form and as "御" in its "Go" form. Therefore "お早うございます" may not be written as "御早うございます". However, "御免なさい" may be written as "ご免なさい". The honorific "O" may not be omitted from any of these expressions.

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June 21, 2005 – Jonathan Wu