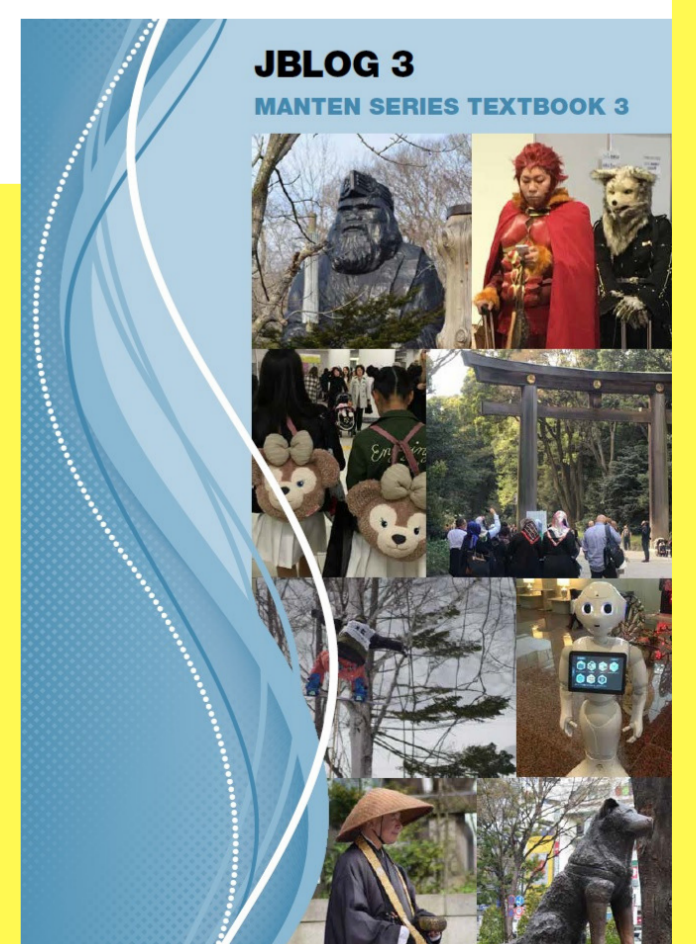


# IS IT TOO HARD TO LEARN A SCRIPTED LANGUAGE?

MANY PEOPLE WORRY ABOUT LEARNING JAPANESE BECAUSE OF THE SCRIPTS USED TO WRITE THE LANGUAGE. IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ENGLISH SO MANY FALSELY ASSUME THAT IT IS A MORE DIFFICULT LANGUAGE TO LEARN. HERE WE EXPLAIN WHY JAPANESE MAY BE EASIER TO LEARN THAN YOU THINK.



# Is it too hard to learn a scripted language?



Before we briefly explain what the scripts are, it may be reassuring to note that Japanese is a phonetic language, which means it is written as it is pronounced. This means it is a lot easier to spell in Japanese than it is in English! Students who have struggled with English spelling will experience a new sense of confidence in their writing due to the phonetic consistency of the Japanese language.

Japanese uses three scripts, namely hiragana, katakana and kanji. English uses the alphabet but this can be written as lower case letters, capital letters and cursive letters.

At first glance, it may appear that many of the Japanese letters look similar. But have you ever considered how similar the English alphabet looks to a non-native speaker? There are many letters in English that are simply a combination of a circle and a straight line: o, p, q, b, d, and a.

Japanese is not a tonal language which means that pronunciation is straight forward. Most people can develop a good Japanese accent quite quickly.

Japanese grammar is also very consistent and easy to master. For example, the four tenses for the verb to eat are simply tabemasu, tabemasen, tabemashita, tabemasen deshita. Only the underlined part changes. In English, however, it completely changes from I eat, to I ate, and does not follow a set pattern across different verbs like Japanese does.

If you would like to learn more about Japanese scripts, there is an explanation in the textbook on pages 4 to 7. The key points to bear in mind are:

1. Hiragana is the first script your child will learn. It has soft, slightly curved letters.
2. Katakana is used to write words that are derived from outside Japan, for example, your name. It has letters that are drawn with straight, sharper lines or dots.
3. Kanji are simplified pictures of words. For example, the number 2 is written as two straight lines 二. Kanji originated in China but have been simplified slightly for Japanese.

Of the three scripts, Kanji are the most difficult to learn but they are usually the most popular. Students tend to enjoy the challenge of writing what appears to non-Japanese speakers as a “secret language”.

There are many apps your child can download to practice this learning. You can ask your school for a list of preferred apps if you are interested in this type of learning support for your child.