

# Community Connections

*Community Connections* is a quarterly column from Mark, our resident CIR (Coordinator for International Relations), to help you get more involved in the local community.



## Bored at home?



### Why not work on your Japanese?

This is normally a space where I write about ways for you to get out there and get involved, but, of course, now we should be self-isolating as much as possible.

So, what to do while holed up in our homes? Around the world, many people are making the most of self-isolation as time for self-improvement – whether that’s exercise, new hobbies, or learning.

For those looking to learn, why not study some Japanese? As foreign residents of Japan, we have all experienced the frustration of not being able to communicate with Japanese people, or to read important signs or documents.



But, at the same time, learning a language so famous for being



difficult can be a daunting task; most of all now, when in-person classes are being cancelled due to the pandemic.

When I first started learning Japanese almost 9 years ago, it was entirely self-taught for two years.

At the time, I was surprised at just how many quality resources were available online for free. In the time since,



the options for online learners have even further expanded.

Here, I have compiled, in no particular order, just some of the many online resources available completely or partially free.

#### General

##### **Minato (website)** *Some charges*

Made available by the Japan Foundation in 2016, Minato (“port” in Japanese) offers a variety of free courses, which make use of videos, worksheets, and other media. The courses, which range from beginner to advanced, have time-limits, and participants can receive completion certificates at the end.

**Recommended for:** People who thrive on structured and regular study

<https://minato-jf.jp/>

#### Grammar

##### **Tae Kim’s Guide (website)** 💰 All free

As a beginner, Tae Kim’s Guide to Japanese Grammar was my weapon of choice for grammar. It begins with the very basics and works right up to *keigo* and other intermediate to advanced grammar.

**Recommended for:** People who love logical explanations of grammar rules

<http://www.guidetojapanese.org/learn/>

## Vocabulary

Many veteran linguists preach the power of the flashcard—used by language learners for generations to cram vocabulary. This time-honored technique has been improved by technology, with the advent of **spaced repetition software (SRS)**.

With SRS, you only review each flashcard after a certain length of time—longer if you get it right, and shorter if you get it wrong. Evidence shows this keeps information in your memory for longer.



**Memrise (website/app)** 💰 Not all free  
Notable for its user-friendly interface, social features and use of SRS, with Memrise you can compare quiz results for some friendly competition and share your mnemonics with help other users study. Make your own flashcards or choose from a selection pre-created by other users.

**Recommended for:** People who want to boost vocabulary while connecting with other learners <https://www.memrise.com/courses>

**Anki (app/program)** 💰 All free  
A well-known example of SRS, Anki (Japanese for “memorize”) can be used not only for language learning but for any kind of memorization. While its interface can be intimidating to some, its vast range of features makes flashcards fully customizable.

**Recommended for:** People who want full control of their learning experience.

<https://apps.ankiweb.net/>



## Kanji

**WaniKani (website)** 💰 Not all free  
WaniKani teaches kanji and kanji-based vocabulary in a unique and structured way, breaking characters down into radicals and providing amusing mnemonics.

**Recommended for:** Beginners wanting to supplement their kanji learning.

<https://www.wanikani.com/>

**Obenkyo (app)** 💰 All free  
Obenkyo (Japanese for “study”) quizzes you on vocabulary and kanji, divided by JLPT level. While its main feature is multiple choice questions, my favorite kanji writing quizzes that use your phone’s touchscreen.

**Recommended for:** People who just can’t seem to get stroke order right.

## Writing

**Lang8 (website)** 💰 Not all free  
On Lang8, you can upload writing in a language you’re learning—anything from diaries and opinion pieces to short stories and poetry—and native speakers will correct it for you. In exchange, you do the same for them!

**Recommended for:** Students who enjoy constructive feedback <https://lang-8.com/>

## Speaking

**italki (website)** 💰 Not all free  
Although italki is mainly for finding teachers who charge money for online classes, you can also find “language partners”, with whom you can pair up and practice speaking each other’s languages.

**Recommended for:** People who enjoy learning through conversation.

These are just a few examples of the many ways we can work on our Japanese online. So, stay home physically, but virtually get out there and explore what’s available! *Ganbatte!*

Mark McPhillips, May 2020

This column is available on our website, at [h-ircd.jp/en/guide/hiroclubnews-en.html](http://h-ircd.jp/en/guide/hiroclubnews-en.html)