

Getting Started Guide



A Level Japanese

**Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in Japanese
(listening, reading and writing) (9JA0)**

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1 Introduction

Our A level qualifications are designed to be appealing and engaging to students, while preparing them for future study and work. We have developed inspiring and culturally relevant courses based on feedback from teachers, students, subject associations, academics and advisors.

The qualification has a clear structure, which will enable students to develop advanced-level, transferable language alongside a deeper cultural appreciation of Japan and Japanese-speaking culture. There is an emphasis on promoting understanding of grammar to allow spontaneous, creative use of language to suit different purposes. The themes are engaging and relevant, combining familiar and new content. Popular texts and films have been chosen, both classical and contemporary.

Pearson is strongly committed to maintaining the availability of a wide range of language A levels. Although some awarding organisations are ceasing to offer those language A levels only taken by a limited number of students, we believe these qualifications make an important contribution to fostering diversity and community cohesion.

We have redeveloped A levels in:

- Arabic
- Greek
- Japanese
- Urdu

And we have developed the following A levels for the first time:

- Gujarati
- Persian
- Portuguese
- Turkish

Note that we have taken the decision not to develop AS qualifications in any of these languages.

This Getting Started Guide provides an overview of the new A level Japanese specification, to help you get to grips with the changes to content and assessment.

2 What's changed?

2.1 AS has not been redeveloped

Our discussions with school and colleges have indicated that, under the new system, in which AS results no longer count towards A level grades, take-up of AS level will be very limited. For this reason we have taken the decision only to offer the full linear A level in the languages being developed for first teaching in 2018.

2.2 Changes to A level qualifications

From September 2018, A level Japanese will be a fully linear qualification. This means that all examinations must be sat at the end of the course. More information about the implications of the move to linear assessment is given on page 8.

Separate subject criteria have been developed for these languages with smaller cohorts. While the level of rigour and demand will be the same, there will be no requirement for students to demonstrate spoken language skills.

For first assessment in 2026, questions and answers to reading and comprehension questions (where writing skills are not assessed) will be required in English. In addition, response to set works questions will be presented in both Japanese and English. Responses to set works questions are still required in Japanese.

Aims and objectives

There is a new set of aims and objectives for this A level. As a result, students are now required to:

- study two works from a prescribed list
- summarise information from spoken and written sources in writing
- develop independent research skills
- undertake a task integrating the skills of listening, reading and writing
- translate from and into the target language.

Themes

The specification content is broken down into four themes relating to the target language culture. Two themes relate to 'society, past and present', and two themes relate to 'political and/or intellectual and/or artistic culture, past and present'.

Prescribed works

In the specification, we have specified a list of prescribed works in the target language, including literary texts and films. Students must study either one literary text and one film, or two literary texts. Knowledge and understanding of works will be assessed in Paper 2 (Translation into Japanese and written response to works).

Summarising information

This is a new requirement testing students' ability to summarise information. Students should be able to:

- identify the main ideas
- summarise a line of argument and/or different points of view
- evaluate and draw conclusions.

Ability to summarise will be assessed in Paper 3 (Listening, reading and writing), question 5(c).

Independent research skills

Students will be required to develop as independent researchers through the study of language. Students are required to select one research subject from the four given in the specification and undertake independent research on all three aspects. Students will have to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the research subject in Paper 1 (Translation into English, reading comprehension and writing (research question)).

Assessment Objectives

The A level languages Assessment Objectives have been revised.

There are two main changes to the Assessment Objectives:

- A new AO4 has been introduced. This requires knowledge and understanding of, and critical and analytical response to, cultural and social issues relating to countries where the target language is spoken.
- AO3 has a greater proportion of the marks than in the previous specification, and has a subtly changed emphasis – there is greater emphasis now on active application of grammar in generating new, independent language.

AO1 20%	Understand and respond in writing to spoken language drawn from a variety of sources
AO2 30%	Understand and respond in writing to written language drawn from a variety of sources
AO3 30%	Manipulate the language accurately, in written forms, using a range of lexis and structures
AO4 20%	Show knowledge and understanding of, and respond critically and analytically to, different aspects of the culture and society of the countries where the language is spoken

2.3 Specification overview

Assessment structure

Paper 1	Translation into English, reading comprehension and writing (research question)	2 hours 30 minutes	40%
Paper 2	Translation into Japanese and written response to works	2 hours 40 minutes	30%
Paper 3	Listening, reading and writing	2 hours 15 minutes	30%

Specification content

Specification content is now based around social, political and cultural themes, relating to the Japanese language, culture and communities. This will enable students to gain a deeper understanding of the culture related to their language of study, and ensure smooth progression to further study

Students will study four themes, set in the context of Japan only:

- Theme 1: 変わっていく若者の生活
- Theme 2: 変わっていく文化
- Theme 3: 変わっていく人生観
- Theme 4: 東日本大震災後の日本

There are a number of sub-themes, which can be found on page 6. The questions in the question papers are set within the context of these themes.

Students are also required to undertake independent research based on one of the four research subjects listed in the specification. Students must research all three aspects within the research subject. Research subjects and aspects are as follows:

- 家族関係や人間関係
 - 伝統的な家族構成：核家族：家庭内の人間関係
- 変わっていく行事
 - 伝統的な祭りや現代的なイベント：イベントや祭りと観光業の影響：西洋行事の流入
- 高齢化社会
 - 高齢者の孤立：家族からのサポート：社会的支援
- 福島原発事故後の省エネ生活
 - 日常生活の中の省エネ：エネルギー供給をめぐる議論：省エネに関する 昔の知恵

Comparison of reformed and legacy specifications

Reformed specification		Legacy specification
Theme 1	変わっていく若者の生活 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 教育 ● 若者の健康(身体面と心理面) 	Education and employment Lifestyle: health and fitness
Theme 2	変わっていく文化 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 変わるポピュラー・カルチャー ● テクノロジーの影響 	Youth culture and concerns
Theme 3	変わっていく人生観 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 変化する労働 ● 長引く不景気 	Education and employment
Theme 4	東日本大震災後の日本 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 3月11日とその直後 ● 復興への政策 	This is a new topic which was not included in the legacy specification.
Literary works	Prescribed list of works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● どんどん読めるいろいろな話、秋元美晴・糸川優 編著、1991 (short-story collection) ● キッチン、吉本ばなな、1998 (novel) 	Study of literary works not compulsory. Students could choose to study one of the prescribed texts for Unit 2 Section C.

Reformed specification	Legacy specification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="475 219 874 297">• 窓際のトットちゃん、黒柳徹子、1991 (autobiography)

Literary works (continued)	Students are expected to produce responses that relate to features such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • form and technique • key themes, concepts and issues • characterisation • plot structure social and cultural setting	
Films	Prescribed list of films: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 千と千尋の神隠し、宮崎駿監督 (2001) • ディア・ドクター、西川美和監督 (2009) • 誰も知らない、是枝裕和監督 (2004) Students are expected to produce responses that relate to features such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • form and technique • key themes, concepts and issues • characterisation • plot structure • social and cultural setting 	Study of film not required.
Independent research	Must be based on one of the four research subjects listed in the specification: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 家族関係や人間関係 • 変わっていく行事 • 高齢化社会 • 福島原発事故後の省エネ生活 Students must research all three aspects of their chosen research subject	Must link to Japanese culture and/or society: chosen from a list of prescribed topics and texts in the specification.
N/A	No equivalent in new specification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Japanese-speaking world • National and international events: past, present and future • Literature and the arts

3 Planning

3.1 Planning a linear A level course

The key difference with a linear A level is that all exams are taken at the end of the (usually) two-year course. As a result, it is not possible to retake individual exams – rather, if you wish to retake, you must retake the entire qualification.

In terms of language learning, this is a logical and positive development because students must retain and build on everything they learn in order to master a language effectively.

Course planning needs to cover:

- four themes
- either two literary texts, or a literary text and a film
- sufficient practice in listening, reading, writing and translation
- a broad range of grammar and opportunities to use this to generate language independently
- independent research of selected research subject
- development of critical and analytical thinking.

Here is just one way in which you might structure a two-year course:

		Grammar	Skills	Research
Year 1	Theme 1	Revision/ Development	Transferable listening, reading, writing, translation, thinking	Develop skills/Research all aspects of chosen research subject
	Theme 2			
	Literary work/Film			
Year 2	Theme 3			
	Theme 4			
	Literary work/Film			
	Revision			

3.2 Suggested resources

Our free **online support** for A level Japanese, which can be accessed on our website, includes guides on:

- [teaching literature](#)
- [teaching film](#)
- [how to analyse a text or film](#)
- [how to develop research skills.](#)

Other useful resources include:

Literature

There is a great deal of information available online about the book *Kitchen*, in both Japanese and English, as it is widely studied globally as an example of contemporary Japanese literature. As with all online sources, teachers and students need to carefully evaluate the reliability of the source.

Films

There is a great deal of information available online about the film *Spirited away*, in both Japanese and English, as this film is studied globally as part of film studies courses. As with all online sources, teachers and students need to carefully evaluate the reliability of the source.

Various online resources

The NHK website has useful short videos which may be a suitable source for listening exercises.

<http://www.nhk.or.jp/school/>

Yahoo Kids may have useful short articles for reading.

<https://kids.yahoo.co.jp/>

Yomiuri Online Kodomo may have useful short articles for reading and videos for listening.

<https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/kodomo/>

The Japan Foundation London Language Centre maintains a list of teaching resources specific to various qualifications.

http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/teaching_resources.php#as

4 Content guidance

The themes and sub-themes identified below are vehicles for the development of linguistic and cognitive skills, as well as cross-cultural awareness. Assessment is predominantly related to the ability to use the target language. Papers 1, 2 and 3 will be based on content from the four themes. Students will need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of, and critical and analytical response to, the target language community and culture.

4.1 Themes and sub-themes

Theme 1, 'Evolving youth issues in Japan', examines the specific social issues and trends that are of core importance to Japan, and enables students to study how they have emerged and are evolving over time. For example, the sub-theme 'physical and mental health in Japanese youth' offers an important insight into the concern within Japanese society that the pressures of modern life are causing many young people to disengage from society, and the efforts to address this.

Theme 2, 'A culture in change', allows students to expand their cultural knowledge by learning about Japanese intellectual culture (Japan's expertise in technology, robotics and automation) and artistic culture (anime, manga and martial arts), and their impact on Japanese society.

Theme 3, 'Changing life expectations', includes sub-themes important in understanding Japanese society, past and present. It is crucial for students to study and engage with the themes of work and the economy to gain an understanding of how people in Japan live and work, and a wider understanding of the evolving society of Japan.

Theme 4, 'Japan post 11 March 2011', focuses on the political culture in Japan in the context of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. These were key events in the history of modern Japan and continue to shape contemporary society and culture, for example in building policies, community cohesion, energy policies and debates over nuclear power generation.

4.2 Prescribed works

Literary works	どんでん読めるいろいろな話、秋元 美晴・糸川 優 編著 1991 (short-story collection) キッチン、吉本ばなな 1998 (novel) 窓際のトットちゃん、黒柳徹子 1991 (autobiography)
Films	千と千尋の神隠し、宮崎駿監督 (2001) ディア・ドクター、西川美和監督 (2009) 誰も知らない、是枝裕和監督 (2004)

For each of the prescribed literary works and films, students need to consider:

- Author/Director
- Relevant background
- Plot
- Main character(s)
- Themes
- Important quotations/dialogue and scenes
- Reference materials and extended reading

For further guidance, download our [guide to analysing text or film](#).

4.3 Kanji list

Please note that the kanji list has been updated and published in the specification. If any kanji not on this list are used in the examination papers, they will be glossed. Knowledge of the kanji specified for GCSE is assumed.

5 Assessment guidance

5.1 Breakdown of Assessment Objectives

The breakdown of Assessment Objectives by paper will be as follows:

Paper	AO1 %	AO2 %	AO3 %	AO4 %	Total
Paper 1: Translation into English, reading comprehension and writing (research question)	-	25	5	10	40%
Paper 2: Translation into Japanese and written response to works	-	-	20	10	30%
Paper 3: Listening, reading and writing	20	5	5	-	30%
Total	20	30	30	20	100%

5.2 Assessment overview

The Pearson Edexcel A level in Japanese comprises three externally-examined papers that assess listening, reading and writing skills.

Paper 1: Translation into English, reading comprehension and writing (research question) 2 hours 30 minutes (80 marks)
Section A: Translation into English (20 marks) We recommend students spend 20 minutes on Section A. Students must translate one unseen passage from Japanese into English. Section A draws on vocabulary and structures from any one of the sub-themes within the four themes.
Section B: Reading (20 marks) We recommend students spend 45 minutes on Section B. Students must respond to a series of comprehension questions based on a variety of text types and genres. Section B draws on vocabulary and structures across all sub-themes within the four themes.
Section C: Writing (research question) (40 marks) We recommend students spend 1 hour 25 minutes on Section C. Students must read one unseen text in Japanese and then answer a question, incorporating information and ideas from both the unseen text and their research findings. Section C draws on a student's independent research of their chosen research subject.

<p>Paper 2: Translation into Japanese and written response to works 2 hours 40 minutes, 110 marks</p>
<p>Section A: Translation into Japanese (20 marks) We recommend students spend 30 minutes on Section A. Students must translate one unseen passage from English into Japanese. Section A draws on vocabulary and structures from any one of the sub-themes within the four themes.</p>
<p>Section B: Written response to works (literary texts) (45 marks) We recommend students spend 1 hour 5 minutes on each response in Sections B and C. Students must write an extended response on either one or two of the literary texts listed in the specification. Students choose one question from a choice of two for each of their chosen literary texts. If a student answers questions on two literary texts, then they do not complete Section C.</p>
<p>Section C: Written response to works (films) (45 marks) We recommend students spend 1 hour 5 minutes on each response in Sections B and C. Students must write an extended response on one of the films listed in the specification (if they only answered one question in Section B). Students choose one question from a choice of two for their chosen film.</p>

<p>Paper 3: Listening, reading and writing in Japanese 2 hours 15 minutes, 60 marks</p>
<p>Section A: Listening comprehension (30 marks) We recommend students spend 45 minutes on Section A. Students must respond to comprehension questions based on a variety of contexts and sources. Section A draws on vocabulary and structures across all sub-themes within the four themes.</p>
<p>Section B: Listening, reading and writing (30 marks) We recommend students spend 1 hour 30 minutes on Section B. Students must summarise a listening source and a text, both of which are based on the same sub-theme. Students must then evaluate the points of view in both sources, stating which views they agree with and why. Section B draws on vocabulary and structures from any one of the sub-themes within the four themes.</p>

5.3 Understanding how to apply the mark grids

Paper 1: Translation into English, reading comprehension and writing (research question)

Section A: Translation into English

The translation into English is marked using a points-based mark scheme (Sample Assessment Materials, page 27). The translation is divided into 20 'chunks', and there is one mark available for the correct translation of each chunk.

The mark scheme gives acceptable answers for each chunk but these are indicative only and variants will be accepted by the examiner if they convey the same intended meaning.

Misspellings are tolerated as long as they don't lead to ambiguity. For example, 'drought' misspelled as 'drowght' would be acceptable, but misspelled as 'draught' would be unacceptable as this is a real word with a different meaning (leading to ambiguity).

Section B: Reading comprehension

The questions in this section are marked using a points-based mark scheme (see Sample Assessment Materials).

There is extensive guidance on the marking principles that will be applied to the questions in this section in the Sample Assessment Materials. The key things to remember are:

- Students don't have to respond in full sentences to open-response questions.
- There are no marks for quality of language in this section, so spelling and grammar mistakes will be tolerated as long as they do not introduce ambiguity.
- For a one-mark answer, the candidate's first response is taken as the answer, even if this response is incorrect and the correct information follows later. Where two marks are available, apply the same rule, i.e. the first two responses are taken as the answer even if they are incorrect and the correct information follows later.
- For first assessment in 2026, students must answer comprehension questions in English – correct answers in the wrong language will not be awarded marks.

Section C: Writing (research question)

This question is marked using three levels-based mark grids:

- Knowledge and understanding of society and culture (AO4)
- Understand and respond to written language (AO2)
- Accuracy and range of language (AO3)

In their response, students should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of society and culture through their ideas, arguments and conclusions, supported by information, references and examples from their research. Students must also refer to information in the text that supports their ideas, arguments and conclusions (thereby showing understanding of the text).

There are more marks available for AO4 (20 marks) than AO2 (10 marks), so students are expected to place more emphasis on knowledge and understanding of society and culture (AO4) than on the text (understand and respond in writing to written language – AO2).

Students can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of society and culture by providing relevant ideas, information, references and examples related to aspects such as:

- lifestyle/customs/events, both current and historical
- important figures, both current and historical
- public opinion, feelings, reaction and behaviour.

Note this list is not exhaustive.

Answers will be marked according to the guidance in the Sample Assessment Materials.

Paper 2: Translation into Japanese and written response to works

Section A: Translation into Japanese

The translation into Japanese is marked using a points-based mark scheme (Sample Assessment Materials, pages 59-60). The translation is divided into 20 'chunks', and there is one mark available for the correct translation of each chunk.

The mark scheme gives acceptable answers for each chunk but these are indicative only and variants will be accepted by the examiner if they convey the same intended meaning.

The mark scheme for Paper 2 states:

- Spelling and orthography: minor non-grammatical errors are tolerated, for example アイスクリム instead of アイスクリーム, as long as they are not ambiguous (for example きって rather than きいて) or in the wrong language.
- Verb endings must be correct and will not be classed as spelling errors.
- Adjective endings must be correct and will not be classed as spelling errors.
- Accept any appropriate alternatives that do not already appear in the acceptable answers column.

Sections B and C: Written response to works

Each individual essay is marked using three levels-based mark grids:

- Critical and analytical response (AO4)
- Range of grammatical structures and vocabulary (AO3)
- Accuracy of language (AO3)

Answers will be marked according to the guidance in the Sample Assessment Materials.

The indicative content given in the mark scheme is not exhaustive, and you will be rewarded for any valid response and may draw on any relevant examples from the work.

Paper 3: Listening, reading and writing

Section A: Listening comprehension

The questions in this section are marked using a points-based mark scheme (see the Sample Assessment Materials).

For first assessment in 2026, students must answer comprehension questions in English - correct answers in the wrong language will not be awarded marks.

Section B: Listening, reading and writing

Questions 5(a) and 5(b) are marked using a points-based mark scheme (Sample Assessment Materials).

Question 5(c) is marked using three levels-based mark grids:

- Understand and respond to spoken language (AO1)
- Understand and respond to written language (AO2)
- Accuracy and range of language (AO3)

Answers will be marked according to the guidance in the Sample Assessment Materials.

6 Subject advisor support

Your subject advisor for languages is Rebecca Waker, and you can contact her with any questions you have about A level Japanese.




Rebecca Waker

Languages



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