What is the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test?

The largest Japanese-language test in the world

The JLPT is a test for non-native speakers of Japanese which evaluates and certifies their Japanese-language proficiency. The test is simultaneously conducted once a year in the United States. The JLPT began in 1984. While at the beginning just 7,000 people applied to take the test in 15 countries and areas worldwide, by 2009 the number of examinees had risen to as many as 770,000 in 54 countries and areas around the world. Currently, it is the largest Japanese-language test in the world.
Serves a variety of purposes

According to the Survey of Overseas Organizations Involved in Japanese-Language Education conducted by the Japan Foundation every three years, the number of students studying Japanese outside of Japan grew from 127,000 in 1979 to 3.65 million in 2009. Along with the increase in students, the number of JLPT examinees has increased. Today, people of various ages, from elementary school students to working individuals, take the JLPT. In addition, the JLPT is used not only to measure ability but also for a variety of purposes, including employment screening and evaluation for pay raises and promotions as well as to recognize qualifications.

Breakdown of examinees

Reasons for taking the JLPT

* Respondents: Overseas examinees taking the December test in 2009 (valid samples: N=423,961) in 170 cities in 52 countries where the Japan Foundation administered the JLPT.
The new JLPT started in 2010.

Over the course of the JLPT’s nearly three decades of history, the number of Japanese-language students has increased and their reasons for studying and using Japanese have become more diverse. In December 2010, the JLPT was revised to meet this changing environment. The new JLPT (new test) incorporates those revisions while inheriting content from the previous test (old test).

Three key points of the new JLPT

**POINT 1 Increased focus on communicative competence**

The new test emphasizes not only (1) knowledge of Japanese-language vocabulary and grammar but also the (2) ability to use the knowledge in actual communication. Thus, it measures (1) through the Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar) test section and (2) through the Reading and Listening test sections. The new test comprehensively measures communicative competence in Japanese through a combined assessment of these sections.

* As with the old test, the new test is a multiple-choice exam that is scored by computer. There is no test section where applicants’ speaking or writing abilities are directly evaluated.

**POINT 2 Five levels offered; examinees can select the right level**

The new test offers five levels (N1, N2, N3, N4, N5). Each level has different test items in order to measure each examinee’s Japanese-language proficiency as accurately as possible. The old test offered four levels (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4). The new test adds one new level that falls between Levels 2 and 3 in the old test; with a total of five levels, the new test allows examinees to select the level that is right for them.

### Summary of linguistic competence required for each level & corresponding levels of new and old tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Summary of linguistic competence required for each level</th>
<th>Corresponding levels of new and old tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1</td>
<td>The ability to understand Japanese used in a variety of circumstances.</td>
<td>Approximately the same level as the old Level 1 test, but designed to measure slightly more advanced abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>The ability to understand Japanese used in everyday situations, and in a variety of circumstances to a certain degree.</td>
<td>Approximately the same level as the old Level 2 test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N3</td>
<td>The ability to understand Japanese used in everyday situations to a certain degree.</td>
<td>Positioned at a level bridging the old Level 2 and Level 3 tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4</td>
<td>The ability to understand basic Japanese.</td>
<td>Approximately the same level as the old Level 3 test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N5</td>
<td>The ability to understand some basic Japanese.</td>
<td>Approximately the same level as the old Level 4 test.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Please see Page 6 for details of linguistic competence required for each level.
The new test adopted a new scoring method to more accurately reflect examinees’ Japanese-language competence in scores. Scores are calculated as “scaled” scores instead of raw scores. Scores in the old test were raw scores calculated by the number of questions answered correctly. It is inevitable that the level of difficulty of the test changes slightly from session to session no matter how carefully questions are designed. Depending on test difficulty, this sometimes results in different scores for the same competency when raw scores are used.

With scaled scores of the new test, how individual examinees answer particular questions (which questions are answered correctly and incorrectly) is reviewed and scores are calculated based on scales for each level. The same scale is always used for the same-level test. Therefore, regardless of difficulty of tests at different times, examinees with the same proficiency have the same score.

As outlined here, scaled scores can more accurately and fairly indicate Japanese-language competence at the time of tests.

Score report
Examinees receive a Score Report that shows pass or fail, scores of scoring sections and total score (scaled scores) as well as reference information. (See Page 5 for scoring sections.)

The reference information indicates the percentages of correct responses* for each component (ex. Vocabulary and Grammar) according to three levels, A, B and C, when a scoring section has multiple components (ex. Language Knowledge [Vocabulary/ Grammar]). This allows examinees to learn how well they performed in each component and plan for their future Japanese-language study.

* The percentage of correct responses is the ratio of correctly answered questions to the total number of questions in each component. The reference information indicates “the number of questions answered correctly,” which differs from scaled scores. It is not used to determine pass or fail.
Test Composition and Linguistic Competence
Required for Each Level

Test sections and test times, scoring sections and range of scores

Test sections at the time of tests are shown in the “Test sections and test times” table at left. Scoring sections in test results are shown in the “Scoring sections and range of scores” table at right.

Please compare the two tables from left to right to see how test sections and scoring sections correspond.

With N1 and N2, one test section, “Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar) · Reading,” is divided into two scoring sections, “Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar)” and “Reading.”

With N3, two test sections, “Language Knowledge (Vocabulary)” and “Language Knowledge (Grammar) · Reading,” are restructured as two scoring sections, “Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar)” and “Reading.”

With N4 and N5, two test sections, “Language Knowledge (Vocabulary)” and “Language Knowledge (Grammar) · Reading,” are combined as one scoring section, “Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar) · Reading.”

With all levels, the “Listening” test section and scoring section are identical.

These differences by level are to ensure a more accurate measurement of an examinee’s Japanese-language competence according to the characteristics of individual study stages.
Summary of linguistic competence required for each level

The table below shows the summary of the linguistic competence required for each level. This table outlines what is expected of examinees for each level of the new JLPT in terms of Reading and Listening. The linguistic knowledge needed to execute the behaviors described will be required by the examinees to pass their respective levels.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Level</th>
<th>Summary of linguistic competence required for each level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1</td>
<td>The ability to understand Japanese used in a variety of circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to read writings with logical complexity and/or abstract writings on a variety of topics, such as newspaper editorials and critiques, and comprehend both their structures and contents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is also able to read written materials with profound contents on various topics and follow their narratives as well as understand the intent of the writers comprehensively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to comprehend orally presented materials such as coherent conversations, news reports, and lectures, spoken at natural speed in a broad variety of settings, and is able to follow their ideas and comprehend their contents comprehensively. One is also able to understand the details of the presented materials such as the relationships among the people involved, the logical structures, and the essential points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>The ability to understand Japanese used in everyday situations, and in a variety of circumstances to a certain degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to read materials written clearly on a variety of topics, such as articles and commentaries in newspapers and magazines as well as simple critiques, and comprehend their contents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is also able to read written materials on general topics and follow their narratives as well as understand the intent of the writers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to comprehend orally presented materials such as coherent conversations and news reports, spoken at nearly natural speed in everyday situations as well as in a variety of settings, and is able to follow their ideas and comprehend their contents. One is also able to understand the relationships among the people involved and the essential points of the presented materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N3</td>
<td>The ability to understand Japanese used in everyday situations to a certain degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to read and understand written materials with specific contents concerning everyday topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is also able to grasp summary information such as newspaper headlines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In addition, one is also able to read slightly difficult writings encountered in everyday situations and understand the main points of the content if some alternative phrases are available to aid one’s understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to listen and comprehend coherent conversations in everyday situations, spoken at near-natural speed, and is generally able to follow their contents as well as grasp the relationships among the people involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4</td>
<td>The ability to understand basic Japanese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to read and understand passages on familiar daily topics written in basic vocabulary and kanji.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to listen and comprehend conversations encountered in daily life and generally follow their contents, provided that they are spoken slowly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N5</td>
<td>The ability to understand some basic Japanese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to read and understand typical expressions and sentences written in hiragana, katakana, and basic kanji.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One is able to listen and comprehend conversations about topics regularly encountered in daily life and classroom situations, and is able to pick up necessary information from short conversations spoken slowly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The new test measures an examinee’s level of knowledge of Japanese-language vocabulary and grammar as the Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar) test section and his or her ability to use that knowledge in actual communication as the Reading and Listening test sections.

The new test measures examinees’ “communicative competence required to perform tasks.” For this purpose, all test item formats of the old test were reviewed and revisions were made. Test item formats of the new test include those directly inherited from the old test, those incorporating partial changes and those newly adopted starting with the new test. Below, test item examples mainly of new format items are described.

### Japanese-language competence measured by the new JLPT
(communicative competence required to perform tasks)

1. Level of knowledge of Japanese-language vocabulary and grammar
2. Ability to use the knowledge (1) in actual communication

### Three test sections
- Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar)
- Reading
- Listening

### Japanese-language competence measured by the new JLPT
(communicative competence required to perform tasks)

#### (1) Level of knowledge of Japanese-language vocabulary and grammar

#### (2) Ability to use the knowledge (1) in actual communication

### Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar)

#### Vocabulary

**Level: N3**

Test item type: Usage

**Level: N2**

Test item type: Text grammar

### Reading and Listening

#### Test item on determining accurate use of a word in a sentence. Test item also found in the old test.

**[Answer: 1]**

### Problem

1. 山田さんは子どもをとてもかわいがっています。
2. あの人は親をとてもかわいがっています。
3. 田中さんは、いただいた時計をとてもかわいがっています。
4. あの人は自分の家をとてもかわいがっています。

**[Answer: 1]**

### Problem

次の文章を読んで、文章全体の内容を考えて、1から 5 の中に最もよいものを、1・2・3・4から一つ選びなさい。

りんごが好きなら、りんごをよく食べなさい。“りんごが好きなら、りんごをよく食べなさい。”

**[Answer: 4]**

おもちゃを真剣に選ぶという方はあまり多くないのでしょうか。

**[Answer: 5]**

おもちゃには大きな力を持つものがあります。次におもちゃを選ぶ時、グッド・トイのように、生きる力を引き出してくれるものを探してみてはいかがでしょうか。
問題 次のAとBはそれぞれ別の新聞のコラムである。AとBの両方を読んで、後の問いに対する答えとして最もよいものを、1・2・3・4から一つ選びなさい。

A

1とBのどちらの記事にも触れられている内容はどれか。
1 新たに盛り込まれた語の意味
2 選定する時 Ricky さんの語の数
3 国新事に収録された語の数
4 今回不採用だった語の具体例

B

この辞書が多く的新語を取り入れたことについて、Aの筆者とBの筆者はどのような立場をとっているか。
1 AもBも、ともに明確にしていない。
2 AもBも、ともに批判的である。
3 Aは批評的であるが、Bは明確にしていない。
4 Aは明確にしていないが、Bは批判的である。

Test item on sentence composition while taking overall text flow into consideration. Instead of focusing only on or the particular sentence, sentences before and after the sentence and overall text need to be carefully read to answer. New test item.

[Answer: 3]

Test item on determining the appropriate response of the person indicated with an arrow (➡) in a particular situation. While looking at an illustration, explanation and questions must be listened to carefully in order to grasp the situation. New test item.

[Answer: 3]
Are any special qualifications needed to take the JLPT?
The JLPT is open to all non-native Japanese speakers. There are no age restrictions for the JLPT.

When will the JLPT be held?
Once a year on the first Sunday in December.
Please check the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles Website (www.jflalc.org) for more information.

At the time of registration, I will not be in the country/area where I want to take the test. What should I do?
You can register online as long as you have a valid credit card.
Q4 How should I decide on which test level to take?
Please see the summary of linguistic competence required for each level on Page 6 and corresponding levels of new and old tests on Page 3.

Q5 How is pass or fail determined?
In order to pass the JLPT, (1) the total score needs to be at or above the point required for passing (overall pass mark) and (2) the scores of each scoring section need to be at or above the minimum point required for passing (sectional pass mark). If there is even one scoring section where the score is below the sectional pass mark, examinees are determined to have failed, no matter how high the total score he/she might have.

Overall pass marks and sectional pass marks for each level are shown in the table below. (N1, N2 and N3 have three scoring sections each: (1) Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar), (2) Reading, and (3) Listening. N4 and N5 have two scoring sections each: (1) Language Knowledge (Vocabulary/Grammar) • Reading, and (2) Listening.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Total score</th>
<th>Scores by scoring section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range of</td>
<td>Language Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scores</td>
<td>(Vocabulary/Grammar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall pass marks</td>
<td>Range of scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1</td>
<td>0 – 180</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>0 – 180</td>
<td>90 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N3</td>
<td>0 – 180</td>
<td>95 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4</td>
<td>0 – 180</td>
<td>90 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N5</td>
<td>0 – 180</td>
<td>80 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6 When and how will I receive my test results?
All examinees will receive their own Score Report. Successful examinees will receive a Certificate of Proficiency. These will be sent out using USPS first class mail at the end of February or early March. If you do not receive your report by the end of March, please contact AATJ.
The Japanese-Language Proficiency Test In The United States

Test date: First Sunday in December
Levels offered: Five levels from N1 to N5

The application deadline is approximately two months before the test date. For details including application method and deadline, please check with the American Association of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ) at www.aatj.org/jlpt.

JLPT USA Website

The American Association of Teachers of Japanese is in charge of organizing the Japanese Language Proficiency Test in the United States. Our website offers a great deal of information about the test including test registration process, test sites, as well as cost. If you are interested in taking the JLPT, please check out our website to find out more information.

Note: Information will be posted as it becomes available.

http://www.aatj.org/jlpt

Test Guide (including Application Form) is available at the AATJ office:

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Campus Box 366
Boulder, CO 80309-0366
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Fax: 303-492-5856
Email: jlpt@aatj.org

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