

Japanese Pitch Accent



Quick Reference Guide

VOL. 1 · PHRASES 1–20

Pitch notation · Examples · 20 essential phrases

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Essential Slang

Words natives use daily that no textbook teaches

1

ぶっちゃけ

ぶ↑っちゃけ [0] Heiban

N2

Casual

Adverb

Honestly / to be real with you. Signals you're about to say something blunt.

When: dropping a blunt opinion, admitting something awkward, or confessing something unexpected

≈ Also: ^{しょうじき}正直 ^いに言う ^と・^{ほんね}本音 ^いを言 ^えば ^{じつ}・^{じつ}実は

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ぶっちゃけ、この^{しごと}仕事^む向いてない^{おも}と思う。

'Honestly, I don't think this job is right for me.'

Essential Slang

Words natives use daily that no textbook teaches

2

やっぱ(り)

や↑っぱ↓ [2] / や↑っぱ↓り [3]

N3

Casual

Adverb

Just as I thought / as expected. The casual drop of やはり — in everyday speech, the full form almost never comes up.

When: confirming a prediction came true, or reconsidering a decision ('やっぱりこっちにしよう')

≈ Also: やはり (formal) · 案の ^{あん} 定 ^{じょう} · やっぱりね

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^{かのじょ} やっぱ ^{うま} 彼女のほうが ^{さいしょ} 上手いよ。 ^{おも} 最初からそう思った。

'She's better, just as I thought. I felt that way from the start.'

Essential Slang

Words natives use daily that no textbook teaches

3

めんどくさい

め↑んどくさ↓い [5]

N3

Casual

i-adj

Such a drag / too much hassle. The go-to word when something demands more effort than it's worth.

When: complaining about chores, meetings, or anything that feels like too much effort

≈ Also: だるい・しんどい (Kansai) ・ ^{めんどろ}面倒くさい (full form)

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^{かくていしんこく}

確定申告ってほんとめんどくさい。

'Filing taxes is such a drag.'



Essential Slang

Words natives use daily that no textbook teaches

4

ガチで

ガ↓チで [1] Atamadaka

N3

Casual

Adverb

Seriously / for real. More intense than マジで — used when something is genuinely, undeniably true.

When: emphasising you're 100% serious, or reacting to something genuinely shocking

≈ Also: マジで・^{ほんとう}本当に・^{ほんき}本気で・マジか？ (question)

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ガチで？ それ^き聞いて^{あんしん}安心した。ありがとう。

'Seriously? That's a relief to hear. Thank you.'



Essential Slang

Words natives use daily that no textbook teaches

5

～じゃん

～じゃん: follows the preceding phrase; final rise = intonation

N3

Casual

Particle

Right? / Isn't it? Casual sentence-ender seeking agreement or stating the obvious.

When: pointing out something obvious, seeking agreement, or casually calling someone out

≈ Also: ～でしょ・～よね・～じゃないか (formal)

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それ^{さいしょ}最初^わから分^わかってたじゃん。なんで今^{いま}さら^い言うの。

'You knew that from the start, right? Why bring it up now?'



Reactions & Fillers

Say these right and natives forget you're learning

6

てか

て↓か [1] Atamadaka

N3

Casual

Conjunction

Wait / anyway / actually. Redirects the conversation or introduces a fresh thought mid-sentence.

When: changing topic mid-conversation, correcting yourself, or cutting in with a new point

≈ Also: というか・それより・そもそも・っていうか

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てか、もう11時^じじゃん。明日^{あした}仕事^{しごと}なのに。

'Wait, it's already 11? And I've got work tomorrow.'



Reactions & Fillers

Say these right and natives forget you're learning

7

なんか

な↓んか [1] Atamadaka

N3

Casual

Adverb

Like / somehow / sort of. Japan's equivalent of the English 'like' filler — overused by every native.

When: hedging a vague feeling, filling silence, or softening a complaint to sound less direct

≈ Also: なんとなく・なんだか・ちょっと・なんていうか

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なんかこの部屋、^{へや}落ち着^おかないんだよね。^っ

'I don't know, something about this room makes me uneasy.'



Reactions & Fillers

Say these right and natives forget you're learning

8

ワンチャン

ワ↓ンチャン [1] Atamadaka

N2

Casual

Adverb

Maybe / there's a chance. Used when something is a long shot but not impossible — born from English 'one chance'.

When: discussing long-shot plans, slim possibilities, or hopeful but uncertain outcomes

≈ Also: もしかしたら・ひょっとしたら・もしかして

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きょうじゅう お がんば
ワンチャン今日中に終わるかも。頑張ろう。

'There's a chance we might actually finish today. Let's go.'



Reactions & Fillers

Say these right and natives forget you're learning

9

マジ(で)

マ↓ジで [1] Atamadaka

N3

Casual

Adverb

Seriously / for real / no way. Works as both a question and an intensifier depending on tone.

When: reacting to surprising news, expressing disbelief, or emphasising you're being serious

≈ Also: ガチで・^{ほんとう}本当に・マジか? (question)・マジかよ

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マジで? それやばすぎ。ちょっと^ま待って。

'For real? That's insane. Hold on.'



Reactions & Fillers

Say these right and natives forget you're learning

10

しれっと

し↑れ↓っと [2] Nakadaka

N2

Casual

Adverb

Nonchalantly / without batting an eye. Used when someone acts as if nothing happened after doing something bold.

When: describing someone who acts calm after doing something bold, late, or embarrassing

≈ Also: さりげなく・何^{なに}食^くわぬ^{かお}顔^{すず}で・涼^{かお}しい顔して

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ちこく まえ せき すわ
遅刻したくせにしれっと前の席に座ってる。

'He was late but just sat down up front like nothing happened.'

Minimal Pairs

Small sound changes. Completely different meanings.

11 はな はな 花 vs 鼻

は↑な↓が [2] (flower) ・ は↑なが [0] (nose)

N5

Casual

Formal

Noun

Same sound, opposite pitch. Mix them up and you're complimenting someone's nose, not their flowers.

When: at hanami, complimenting someone's flowers (not their nose), or any はな conversation

≈ Also: 端 (はなれた先端のこと)

play audio

「はなが綺麗」 — 花を褒めてるのか、鼻を褒めてるのか、
ピッチアクセントで一発でわかる。

'Your hana is beautiful' — are you complimenting the flowers or the nose? Pitch accent clears it up instantly.



Minimal Pairs

Small sound changes. Completely different meanings.

12

あめ あめ
飴 vs 雨

あ↑めが [0] (candy) ・ あ↓めが [1] (rain)

N5

Casual

Formal

Noun

Drop the pitch wrong and you're handing out rain instead of sweets.

When: offering sweets, discussing rainy weather, or any time context alone won't save you

≈ Also confused: 網 (あみ→・net) ・ 尼 (あま→・Buddhist nun)

[play audio](#)

① 飴をどうぞ。 ② 今日は雨が降るらしいよ。

① Please have some candy. ② Apparently it's going to rain today.



Minimal Pairs

Small sound changes. Completely different meanings.

13

びょういん

びょういん

病院 vs 美容院

びょ・う・い・ん (4 mora) ・ び・よ・う・い・ん (5 mora)

N3

Casual

Formal

Noun

One mora changes your destination: hospital or hair salon.

When: telling someone where you are going —

「よ」を一拍 (いっぱく) 残 (のこ) すと美容院 (びょういん)

びょういん はく びょういん はく

≈ Mora: 病院 4拍 ・ 美容院5拍

[play audio](#)

びょういん い

① 病院 に行ってくる。 ② 美容院 に行ってくる。

びょういん い

① I'm going to the hospital. ② I'm going to the hair salon.

Minimal Pairs

Small sound changes. Completely different meanings.

14 おばさん vs おばあさん

お | ば | さ | ん (aunt · 4 mora) · お | ば | あ | さ | ん
(grandmother · 5 mora)

N5

Casual

Formal

Noun

One extra あ changes the generation: aunt or grandmother.

When: talking about family —

「ば」の後（あと）の「あ」を一拍（いっぱく）残（のこ）すと、おばあさんになる

≈ Mora count: おばさん（お・ば・さ・ん）4拍 · おばあさん（お・ば・あ・^{はく}さ・ん）5拍

[play audio](#)

① おばさんが来たよ。 ② おばあさんが来たよ。

① My aunt came over. ② My grandmother came over.

Minimal Pairs

Small sound changes. Completely different meanings.

15 切る vs 着る

き↓る [1] (cut) ・ き↑る [0] (wear)

N5

Casual

Formal

Verb

Same romanisation, different pitch. Get this wrong and you're asking someone to cut your shirt, not wear it.

When: giving fashion advice, asking someone to cut something, or clothing-related sentences

≈ Also confused: 来る (く→る ・ to come, flat) vs 繰る (く↑る↓ ・ to reel)

[play audio](#)

① ハサミで紙を切ってください。 ② このシャツ着てみてよ。

① Please cut the paper with scissors. ② Try wearing this shirt.



Longer Phrases — The Real Test

Multi-word expressions where pitch makes or breaks you

16

どうしようもない

どうしようもない: phrasing changes with context

N3

Casual

Expression

Nothing can be done / It's hopeless. Stronger than
しょうがない — for when a situation is truly beyond fixing.

When: a mistake can't be undone, a deadline has passed, or a situation is
truly beyond repair

≈ Also: しょうがない・仕方ない・どうにもならない・諦めるしかない

play audio

もう締め切り過ぎてるし、どうしようもないね。

'The deadline's already passed — there's honestly nothing we
can do.'

Longer Phrases — The Real Test

Multi-word expressions where pitch makes or breaks you

17 ^{かげん} いい加減にして

いいかげんにして: pronounce in natural accent phrases

N3

Casual

Expression

Enough is enough / Cut it out. The outburst when patience runs out. Every native says it; no textbook teaches it.

When: someone crosses your last line after repeated warnings, or a long argument finally breaks you

≈ Also: ^{かげん} やめてよ・もうやめて・いい加減にしろ (stronger/masculine)

play audio

^{かげん} 「もういい加減にして！さっきからずっとそればかり。」

'Enough already! You've been going on about that this whole time.'

Longer Phrases — The Real Test

Multi-word expressions where pitch makes or breaks you

18

ちょっとよろしいですか

ちょっと | よろしいですか (two natural phrases)

N3

Formal

Expression

Do you have a moment? The standard polite way to interrupt at work. Get this right and you sound natural in a Japanese office.

When: approaching a superior at work, starting a formal request, or interrupting someone politely

すこ じかん いま
≈ Also: 少しよろしいですか・お時間いただけますか・今よろしいですか

[play audio](#)

ぶちょう

部長、ちょっとよろしいですか？確認したいことがあるんですが。

かくにん

'Manager, do you have a moment? There's something I need to confirm.'

Longer Phrases — The Real Test

Multi-word expressions where pitch makes or breaks you

19 お互い様ですよ

おたがいさまですよ: intonation changes with context

N2

Casual

Formal

Expression

It goes both ways — the graceful way to wave off thanks or an apology, implying both sides owe each other equally.

When: brushing off thanks or an apology — especially when both sides mutually benefited

≈ Also: こちらこそ・お気になさらず・どういたしまして

play audio

Casual 「^{こま}困^{とき}った時はお互^{たが}い様^{さま}だよ。」

'When times are tough, we look out for each other.'

Formal 「^{せんじつ}先日はありがとうございました。」 「こちらこそ、お互^{たが}い様^{さま}ですよ。」

'Thank you for the other day.' / 'Not at all — it goes both ways.'



Longer Phrases — The Real Test

Multi-word expressions where pitch makes or breaks you

20

そんなことないですよ

そんなことないですよ: intonation changes with context

N4

Casual

Formal

Expression

Not at all / That's not true. The go-to response when someone puts themselves down or fishes for reassurance. Used constantly.

When: responding to self-deprecation, excessive apologies, or anyone who undersells themselves

≈ Also: とんでもないです・そうじゃないですよ・そんなことないよ (casual)

play audio

Casual わたし はな 「私 っ て 話す の へ た く そ だ よ ね。」 「そんなことないよ！」
'I'm bad at talking, aren't I?' 'That's not true at all!'

Formal せつめい へた もう わけ 「説明が下手で申し訳ありません。」 「そんなことないですよ、
わかりやすかったです。」
'I'm sorry my explanation wasn't clear.' 'Not at all — it was easy to follow.'

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