

Chapter 1

Japanese in a Nutshell

In This Chapter

- ▶ Dipping your toes into Japanese writing and grammar
- ▶ Working with simple expressions and basic numbers
- ▶ Exploring Japanese at home, at work, at play, and abroad

Welcome to Japanese! Now that you've decided to learn this intriguing language, I'm sure you're eager to find out as much as you can as quickly as you can. After all, you probably have co-workers, friends, neighbors, and others to impress with your newfound language skills. Well, here's your chance to dive into Japanese. This chapter offers you a mini-preview of what you can find throughout *Japanese For Dummies*, 2nd Edition.

Discovering Basic Japanese Sounds and Script

Japanese sounds are pretty easy to pronounce. For one thing, Japanese has only five basic vowels: **a** (ah), **i** (ee), **u** (oo), **e** (eh), and **o** (oh). In addition, you don't see a long string of consonants before or after a vowel, unlike in Russian or Polish. You just have to pay attention to a handful of strange consonants, such as the Japanese **r**, which makes a sound somewhere between the English **l** and **r**. You can pronounce basic sounds in Japanese along with the audio recordings in Chapter 2.

Japanese writing, on the other hand, can be confusing because Japanese scripts don't look at all like Western alphabets. The Japanese scripts consist of two sets of **kana** (kah-nah) — phonetic symbols for Japanese syllables — and about 2,000 **kanji** (kahn-jee) characters, which are Chinese characters adapted for Japanese. If you just want to learn how to speak Japanese, you may want to skip focusing on these Japanese scripts and use **rōmaji** (roh-mah-jee), the Romanized spellings of Japanese words. However, getting used

to the Japanese scripts is a good idea, especially if you plan to use your Japanese skills to travel. If you can recognize some of the Japanese scripts, you can get around in a Japanese town more easily because all street signs are written in only the Japanese scripts.

Another advantage of being able to recognize the Japanese scripts, especially **kana**, is that you can avoid reading Japanese like English. For example, the Japanese word that means *bamboo* is **take**. As an English speaker, you may have an urge to read **take** as teh-ee-koo because you know the English word *to take*, but the Japanese pronunciation of this word is tah-keh. In this case, the **rōmaji** may mislead you, but the **kana**, たけ, wouldn't because your existing knowledge in English can't interfere. Chapter 2 shows all **kana** characters and some representative **kanji** characters for your reference.

Getting a Grip on Basic Grammar

Japanese grammar is quite different from English grammar, particularly when it comes to word order in sentences. Even if grammar was your most hated subject, you can't avoid learning grammar if you want to speak Japanese like a native. Without grammar, you'll sound like a big 2-year-old, saying things like the Japanese counterparts of *Brian car*, *me kiss Mary*, or *John in office*.



You generally put the verb at the end of the sentence and add the particle **o** (oh) after the direct object noun. So to mean *to eat sushi*, say **sushi o taberu** (soo-shee oh tah-beh-roo), where **taberu** means *to eat*.

For further insight into Japanese grammar, head to Chapter 3, which tells you all about parts of speech; conjugation patterns; and the structure of words, phrases, and sentences.

Easing into Common Expressions

What are the most common communicative situations? Introducing yourself, greeting, parting, thanking, apologizing . . . I can keep listing them, but I'd rather introduce you to some common expressions (you can find more of them in Chapter 4):

- ✓ はじめまして。 **Hajimemashite**. (hah-jee-meh-mah-shee-teh.) (*How do you do?*)
- ✓ 宜しくお願いします。 **Yoroshiku onegai shimasu**. (yoh-roh-shee-koo oh-neh-gah-ee shee-mah-soo.) (*Pleased to meet you.*)

- ✓ おはようございます。 **Ohayō gozaimasu.** (oh-hah-yohh goh-zah-ee-mah-soo.) (*Good morning.*)
- ✓ じゃあ、また。 **Jā, mata.** (jahh, mah-tah.) (*I'll see you again.*)
- ✓ ありがとうございます。 **Arigatō gozaimasu.** (ah-ree-gah-tohh goh-zah-ee-mah-soo.) (*Thank you.*)
- ✓ すみません。 **Sumimasen.** (soo-mee-mah-sehn.) (*I'm sorry.*)

Counting on Numbers

Numbers dominate everyday life. What time do you wake up? How many glasses of water do you drink a day? How many guests are you expecting? How much does buying groceries cost? Chapter 5 lets you count both small and large numbers and use them with the right counters.

Counters, you ask? The Japanese use a short, suffix-like element called a *counter* right after the number. The counter you use varies depending on the type of things you're counting or the kind of notions you're specifying. To start with, count the bare simple numbers from one to ten:

- ✓ 一 **ichi** (ee-chee) (*one*)
- ✓ 二 **ni** (nee) (*two*)
- ✓ 三 **san** (sahn) (*three*)
- ✓ 四 **yon** (yohn) or **shi** (shee) (*four*)
- ✓ 五 **go** (goh) (*five*)
- ✓ 六 **roku** (roh-koo) (*six*)
- ✓ 七 **nana** (nah-nah) or **shichi** (shee-chee) (*seven*)
- ✓ 八 **hachi** (hah-chee) (*eight*)
- ✓ 九 **kyū** (kyooo) or **ku** (koo) (*nine*)
- ✓ 十 **jū** (jooo) (*ten*)



Japanese also frequently uses the Arabic numerals (*1, 2, and so on*) that you're used to seeing.

You can read more about using numbers, including using them to tell time and specify dates, in Chapter 5.

Speaking Japanese around the House

You spend at least a half of your time in your house every day — sleeping, cooking, eating, watching TV, and so on. Here are some terms to help you name the rooms in your house in Japanese:

- ✓ ダイニング **dainingu** (dah-ee-neen-goo) (*dining room*)
- ✓ 風呂場 **furoba** (foo-roh-bah) (*bathing room*)
- ✓ キッチン **kitchin** (keet-cheen) (*kitchen*)
- ✓ リビング **ribingu** (ree-been-goo) (*living room*)
- ✓ 寝室 **shinshitsu** (sheen-shee-tsoo) (*bedroom*)

Chapter 6 introduces the Japanese words you need for naming things in your house and expressing what you do in your house.

Using Japanese in Social Scenarios

I can't stress enough that a language is just the tool for communication. Communication should be your ultimate goal for studying any language. You communicate with people not only for socialization and entertainment but also for completing daily tasks successfully with your family, friends, and colleagues. That is, developing good language skills is the key to your success in your life! The following sections introduce you to some of the vocabulary you need in various social situations.

Making small talk

If you want to say something more than just “hello” when you see someone, make a point of knowing Japanese phrases that can help you initiate small talk. Start with questions like the following:

- ✓ どちらまでですか。 **Dochira made desu ka.** (doh-chee-rah mah-deh deh-soo kah.) (*Where are you heading to?*)
- ✓ いい天気ですね。 **Ii tenki desu ne.** (eee tehn-kee deh-soo neh.) (*It's nice today, isn't it?*)
- ✓ ご兄弟は。 **Go-kyōdai wa.** (goh-kyohh-dah-ee wah.) (*Do you have any siblings?*)
- ✓ メールアドレスは。 **Mēru adoresu wa.** (mehh-roo ah-doh-reh-soo wah.) (*What's your e-mail address?*)

Chapter 7 shows you how to conduct small talk in Japanese.

Asking for directions



When you need to ask for directions to somewhere, name the place you want to go, add the particle **wa** (wah) after it, and say **doko desu ka** (doh-koh deh-soo kah), as in **Eki wa doko desu ka.** (eh-kee wah doh-koh deh-soo kah.) (*Where is the train station?*)

Chapter 8 shows you how to ask or give directions in Japanese.

Eating out and buying food

If you love eating Japanese foods, you need to know how to place an order at a restaurant in Japanese. Your server will ask you, **Go-chūmon wa.** (goh-chooo-mohn wah.) (*Your order?*). That's your opportunity to say, for example, **Sushi o onegai shimasu.** (soo-shee oh oh-neh-gah-ee shee-mah-soo.) (*Sushi, please.*)

Find out more about how to eat out at restaurants and buy food in Chapter 9.

Going shopping

Who doesn't love shopping? If you're looking for something in particular, name it, add **wa** (wah) after it, and say **arimasu ka** (ah-ree-mah-soo kah), as in **Sukāfu wa arimasu ka.** (soo-kahh-foo wah ah-ree-mah-soo kah.) (*Do you have a scarf?*). Definitely check the price, though. You can do so by asking **Ikura desu ka.** (ee-koo-rah deh-soo kah.) (*How much?*).

Turn to Chapter 10 for more words and phrases that can help you have successful shopping experiences in Japanese.

Exploring entertainment opportunities

Hanging out at home is fun, but if you do that 7 days a week, 365 days a year, it's going to get boring. So why not head out and explore the entertainment opportunities your community has to offer? I bet you'll find some of the following:

- ✔ 美術館 **bijutsukan** (bee-joo-tsoo-kahn) (*art museums*)
- ✔ 劇場 **gekijō** (geh-kee-johh) (*theaters for performing arts*)

- ✓ 博物館 **hakubutsukan** (hah-koo-boo-tsoo-kahn) (*museums*)
- ✓ カラオケ **karaoke** (kah-rah-oh-keh) (*karaoke*)
- ✓ クラブ **kurabu** (koo-rah-boo) (*nightclub*)

Chapter 11 introduces more fun places and shows you what you can do there in Japanese.

Doing business and communicating

Do you want to work in Japan or in a Japanese company in the United States? If the answer to either question is *yes*, you need to have a bunch of business-related vocabulary under your belt. Chapter 12 provides such words, including

- ✓ ヴォicemail **boisu-mēru** (boh-ee-soo-mehh-roo) (*voicemail*)
- ✓ 配達する **haitatsu suru** (hah-ee-tah-tsoo soo-roo) (*to deliver*)
- ✓ 確認する **kakunin suru** (kah-koo-neen soo-roo) (*to confirm*)
- ✓ コピーする **kopī suru** (koh-peee soo-roo) (*to make copies*)
- ✓ 会議 **kaigi** (kah-ee-gee) (*meeting, conference*)
- ✓ メール **mēru** (mehh-roo) (*e-mail*)
- ✓ パソコン **pasokon** (pah-soh-kohn) (*computer*)

Enjoying sports, hobbies, recreation, and more

What better way to have a good time than by playing or watching your favorite sport or indulging in a favorite hobby? Do you like any of the following activities?

- ✓ 読書 **dokusho** (doh-koo-shoh) (*reading*)
- ✓ キルティング **kirutingu** (kee-roo-teen-goo) (*quilting*)
- ✓ キャンプ **kyanpu** (kyahn-poo) (*camping*)
- ✓ 水泳 **suiei** (soo-ee-ehh) (*swimming*)
- ✓ 釣り **tsuri** (tsoo-ree) (*fishing*)

Flip to Chapter 13 to find out how to talk about many other fun activities. And who knows? You may be inspired to pick up a new hobby while you're at it!

Tackling Travel-Related Topics

After you've been studying Japanese for a while and the travel bug bites, you may feel like making the journey to Japan to really immerse yourself in the language and culture. From packing your bags to choosing accommodations and navigating emergencies, the next sections give you some of the basic vocabulary you need when traveling in Japan.

Preparing for a trip

The first step in preparing for your trip is to decide where to go. Then, depending on your destination, you'll need to get a passport and book a flight. Here are some Japanese terms to consider as getting ready to plan a trip:

- ✓ チケット **chiketto** (chee-keht-toh) (*ticket*)
- ✓ 飛行機 **hikōki** (hee-kohh-kee) (*airplane*)
- ✓ ホテル **hoteru** (hoh-teh-roo) (*hotel*)
- ✓ パスポート **pasupōto** (pah-soo-pohh-toh) (*passport*)
- ✓ スーツケース **sūtsukēsu** (sooo-tsoo-kehh-soo) (*suitcase*)

Chapter 14 helps you make your travel plan in addition to packing your suitcase.

Making sense of money

You need money no matter where you travel, and if you're headed to a foreign destination, you need to be prepared **ryōgae suru** (ryohh-gah-eh soo-roo) (*to exchange*) your country's currency for that of your destination country. Be sure to bring enough **genkin** (gehn-keen) (*cash*) to the exchange counter.



Even at a foreign **ginkō** (geen-kohh) (*bank*), you may be able to use your ATM card to withdraw funds from your **kōza** (kohh-za) (*account*) in the right currency.

For more money-related words, as well as information on the Japanese **en** (ehn) (*yen*), see Chapter 15.

Getting around with local transportation

Make sure you know the best ways of getting from place to place in a foreign country you're planning on visiting. In large urban areas, people often walk or

take the **chikatetsu** (chee-kah-teh-tsoo) (*subway*). Other common methods of transportation may include one (or more!) of the following:

- ✓ 電車 **densha** (dehn-shah) (*train*)
- ✓ フェリー **ferī** (feh-reee) (*ferry*)
- ✓ 自転車 **jitensha** (jee-tehn-shah) (*bicycle*)
- ✓ タクシー **takushī** (tah-koo-sheee) (*taxi*)

I cover transportation information in Chapter 16.

Securing a place to stay

You have several options to choose from when choosing your accommodations in Japan:

- ✓ ビジネスホテル **bijinesu hoteru** (bee-jee-neh-soo hoh-teh-roo) (*business hotel*)
- ✓ 観光ホテル **kankō hoteru** (kahn-kohh hoh-teh-roo) (*tourist's hotel*)
- ✓ カプセルホテル **kapuseru hoteru** (kah-poo-seh-roo hoh-teh-roo) (*capsule hotel*)
- ✓ 旅館 **ryokan** (ryoh-kahn) (*Japanese-style inn*)
- ✓ ユースホステル **yūsu hosuteru** (yooo-soo hoh-soo-teh-roo) (*youth hostel*)

Chapter 17 helps you choose the right accommodation for your needs, make a reservation, check into it, and check out at the end of your trip.

Taking action during emergencies

No one likes to think about experiencing an emergency while traveling, but if you're in a foreign country, you're better off knowing what to do if an illness, injury, or emergency pops up. Chapter 18 provides you with the confidence and the Japanese to act wisely when you face an emergency.



Memorize these phrases now — and hope you don't need them later:

- ✓ だれか！ **Dareka!** (dah-reh-kah!) (*Someone help!*)
- ✓ 泥棒！ **Dorobō!** (doh-roh-bohh!) (*A thief!*)
- ✓ 火事！ **Kaji!** (kah-jee!) (*Fire!*)
- ✓ 助けて！ **Tasukete!** (tah-soo-keh-teh!) (*Help me!*)