

Japanese Particles Cheat Sheet

Master Essential Japanese Grammar Particles Through Visual Examples



NihongoDoya Educational Series

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What Are Japanese Particles?

In Japanese, grammar is built around **particles** (助詞 - じょし). Particles are short suffixes that follow nouns, verbs, or clauses to define their grammatical role in a sentence. Without particles, a Japanese sentence is just a list of vocabulary words with no clear connection.

Why particles are important:

Unlike English, which relies heavily on word order (Subject-Verb-Object), Japanese word order is flexible because **particles explicitly tell you who is doing what, where, and to whom**.

Let's look at a simple example:

Japanese: 私は学生です。

Hiragana: わたし は がくせい です。

English: As for me, I am a student.

In this sentence, the particle **は** (pronounced 'wa') marks **私** (me) as the main topic. It acts as a spotlight, telling the listener: 'We are now talking about me.'

Why learners struggle:

Many particles do not have a direct translation in English, and some (like は and が, or に and で) seem to overlap in meaning. This cheat sheet is designed to clear up that confusion using **visual target graphics, comparison tables, and authentic examples** that target N5 and N4 grammar. Let's get started!

Quick Reference Overview Chart

Particle	Main Function	Example Sentence	Translation
は (wa)	Topic Marker	私は学生です。	As for me, I am a student.
が (ga)	Subject Marker	猫がいます。	There is a cat.
を (o)	Direct Object	水を飲みます。	I drink water.
に (ni)	Time / Destination / Location	学校に行きます。	I go to school.
へ (e)	Direction of movement	日本へ行きます。	I go towards Japan.
で (de)	Location of action / Means	図書館で勉強する。	Study at the library.
と (to)	And / With / Quote	犬と猫がいます。	There is a dog and a cat.
も (mo)	Also / Too / Inclusive	私も行きます。	I will go too.
の (no)	Possession / Modifier	私の本です。	It is my book.
から (kara)	From / Starting Point / Reason	東京から来ました。	I came from Tokyo.
まで (made)	Until / Limit Point	三時まで勉強します。	Study until 3 o'clock.
や (ya)	And (incomplete list)	本やペンがあります。	There are books, pens, etc.
ね (ne)	Agreement / 'isn't it?'	美味しいですね。	It's delicious, isn't it?
よ (yo)	Assertion / 'you know!'	危ないですよ。	It is dangerous, you know!
か (ka)	Question / Or	学生ですか。	Are you a student?
しか (shika)	Only (used with negative)	一つしかありません。	I have only one.
でも (demo)	Even / Or something	お茶でもどうですか。	How about tea or something?
など (nado)	Et cetera / And the like	果物などを買いました。	I bought fruits, etc.

PARTICLE: は – TOPIC MARKER



Grammatical Function:

Marks the main topic of the sentence. Introduces what you are talking about. Think of it as 'as for X...'.

Pattern: Noun + は

Example:

Japanese: 私は学生です。

Hiragana: わたし は がくせい です。

English: As for me, I am a student.

Common Mistakes: Don't confuse with が. Use は for general statements or when the topic has already been introduced.

Memory Tip: Think of は as a spotlight shining on the topic of your conversation.

PARTICLE: が – SUBJECT MARKER



Grammatical Function:

Marks the specific subject performing the action. Often answers the question 'who' or 'which one' performs the action.

Pattern: Noun + が

Example:

Japanese: 私が学生です。

Hiragana: わたし が がくせい です。

English: I am the student (the one you are looking for).

Common Mistakes: Don't confuse with は. Use が to emphasize the subject itself or introduce new information.

Memory Tip: Think of が as a pointer pointing specifically to the subject that matters.

PARTICLE: を - OBJECT MARKER



Grammatical Function:

Marks the direct object of a transitive verb. It indicates what is receiving the action of the verb.

Pattern: Noun + を + Transitive Verb

Example:

Japanese: りんごを食べます。

Hiragana: りんご を たべます。

English: I eat an apple.

Common Mistakes: Only use を with transitive verbs (verbs where an action is done to an object). Don't use with intransitive verbs.

Memory Tip: Imagine を as a bridge connecting the active verb directly to the object.

PARTICLE: に - TIME / DESTINATION / EXISTENCE



Grammatical Function:

Marks a specific point in time, a destination (target of movement), or the location where someone or something exists.

Pattern: Noun (Time/Place) + に

Example:

Japanese: 七時に学校に行きます。

Hiragana: しちじ に がっこう に いきます。

English: I go to school at 7 o'clock.

Common Mistakes: Do not use に for relative time words like 'tomorrow' (あした) or 'today' (きょう). Only for absolute time.

Memory Tip: Think of に as a pin on a map or clock, marking a precise target.

PARTICLE: へ – DIRECTION MARKER**Grammatical Function:**

Marks the general direction of movement. Written as 'he' (へ) but pronounced as 'e'. Emphasizes the path rather than the end destination.

Pattern: **Noun (Place/Direction) + へ**

Example:

Japanese: 日本へ行きます。

Hiragana: にほん へ いきます。

English: I will go towards Japan.

Common Mistakes: Unlike に, へ cannot be used to mark a point in time or a point of existence. It is only for motion.

Memory Tip: Imagine へ as a compass needle pointing towards the general direction of travel.

PARTICLE: で – LOCATION OF ACTION / MEANS**Grammatical Function:**

Marks where an action takes place, or indicates the tool, method, or means used to perform an action.

Pattern: **Noun (Place/Tool) + で**

Example:

Japanese: 図書館でペンで書きます。

Hiragana: としょかん で ペン で かきます。

English: I write with a pen at the library.

Common Mistakes: Do not use で for simple existence (e.g. 'there is a book on the desk' uses に, not で).

Memory Tip: Think of で as a boundary bubble containing the action or a tool in hand.

PARTICLE: と - AND / WITH / QUOTATION



Grammatical Function:

Connects nouns in a complete list ('and'), marks the person you do an action with ('with'), or marks a quotation.

Pattern: Noun + と + Noun / Phrase + と (思います/言います)

Example:

Japanese: 友達と犬と猫を見ました。

Hiragana: ともだち と いぬ と ねこ を みました。

English: I saw a dog and a cat with my friend.

Common Mistakes: Only use と to connect nouns. To connect clauses or verbs, use different grammar patterns.

Memory Tip: Think of と as a linking chain that lists items completely or connects partners.

PARTICLE: も - ALSO / INCLUSIVE MARKER



Grammatical Function:

Replaces particles は, が, or を to indicate that the noun is also included. Means 'also', 'too', or 'as well'.

Pattern: Noun + も

Example:

Japanese: 私も英語が話せます。

Hiragana: わたし も えいご が はなせます。

English: I can also speak English.

Common Mistakes: Do not write 'はも' or 'がも'. も completely replaces は, が, and を in a sentence.

Memory Tip: Think of も as a plus sign (+) adding another item to the group.

PARTICLE: の – POSSESSION / DESCRIPTION**Grammatical Function:**

Links two nouns to show possession, belonging, relationship, or to turn a noun into an adjective-like modifier.

Pattern: **Noun A + の + Noun B**

Example:

Japanese: これは日本語の本です。

Hiragana: これ は にほんご の ほん です。

English: This is a Japanese language book.

Common Mistakes: Remember the order is Noun A (owner/description) modifies Noun B (the object). It is opposite to English 'of'.

Memory Tip: Think of の as a key linking an owner to their property.

PARTICLE: から – FROM / STARTING POINT**Grammatical Function:**

Marks the starting point in time or space. Means 'from' or 'since'. Also used to state a cause/reason.

Pattern: **Noun + から / Phrase + から**

Example:

Japanese: 家から駅まで歩きます。

Hiragana: いえ から えき まで あるきます。

English: I walk from my house to the station.

Common Mistakes: Do not confuse with で. から is the starting point, while で is the tool or location of action.

Memory Tip: Imagine から as a green flag at the starting line of a race.

PARTICLE: まで - UNTIL / LIMIT MARKER

**Grammatical Function:**

Marks the end point in time or space. Means 'until', 'to', or 'up to'.

Pattern: **Noun + まで**

Example:

Japanese: 三時まで勉強します。

Hiragana: さんじ まで べんきょう します。

English: I will study until 3 o'clock.

Common Mistakes: まで indicates a continuous action until the limit. Don't confuse with までに (by / deadline).

Memory Tip: Imagine まで as the checkered flag marking the finish line.

PARTICLE: や - AMONG OTHERS / INCOMPLETE LIST

**Grammatical Function:**

Connects nouns in an open-ended, incomplete list. Suggests there are other items in the category not mentioned.

Pattern: **Noun + や + Noun**

Example:

Japanese: 本やペンを買いました。

Hiragana: ほん や ペン を かいました。

English: I bought books and pens (among other things).

Common Mistakes: Do not use や for complete lists. If you bought only those two things, use と instead.

Memory Tip: Think of や as a box with a few examples showing, with others hidden inside.

PARTICLE: ね - AGREEMENT / SENTENCE ENDING

**Grammatical Function:**

Used at the end of a sentence to seek agreement, confirmation, or show empathy. Equivalent to 'isn't it?' or 'right?'.

Pattern: Sentence + ね

Example:

Japanese: いい天気ですね。

Hiragana: いい てんき です ね。

English: It's nice weather, isn't it?

Common Mistakes: Avoid overusing ね in formal business emails. It makes speech sound casual and intimate.

Memory Tip: Think of ね as a friendly handshake, checking if the listener agrees.

PARTICLE: よ - NEW INFORMATION / ASSERTION

**Grammatical Function:**

Used at the end of a sentence to share new information, emphasize a point, or give a warning. Equivalent to 'you know!'.

Pattern: Sentence + よ

Example:

Japanese: これは美味しいですよ。

Hiragana: これ は おいしい です よ。

English: This is delicious, you know!

Common Mistakes: Overusing よ can sound overly bossy, assertive, or patronizing if spoken with a harsh intonation.

Memory Tip: Think of よ as a megaphone sharing fresh information with the listener.

PARTICLE: か - QUESTION MARKER



Grammatical Function:

Marks a question at the end of a sentence. Also used in the middle of sentences to express 'or' or alternatives.

Pattern: Sentence + か / Noun + か + Noun

Example:

Japanese: 日本語の本ですか、英語の本ですか。

Hiragana: にほんご の ほん ですか、えいご の ほん ですか。

English: Is it a Japanese book or an English book?

Common Mistakes: In casual speech, native speakers often drop か and use a rising intonation instead.

Memory Tip: Think of か as a question mark (?) that fits neatly at the end of speech.

PARTICLE: しか - ONLY / EXCLUSIVE MARKER



Grammatical Function:

Indicates that nothing else is possible. Means 'only' or 'nothing but' and must be paired with a negative verb.

Pattern: Noun + しか + Negative Verb

Example:

Japanese: 一時間しか寝ませんでした。

Hiragana: いちじかん しか ねませんでした。

English: I only slept for one hour (and nothing more).

Common Mistakes: Always pair しか with a negative verb. If using a positive verb for 'only', use だけ instead.

Memory Tip: Think of しか as a high wall shutting everything else out, leaving only one thing.

PARTICLE: でも - EVEN / ALTERNATIVE / SUGGESTION



Grammatical Function:

Means 'even' (e.g. even a child can do it), indicates a suggestion ('or something'), or starts a sentence as 'but'.

Pattern: Noun + でも / Sentence + でも

Example:

Japanese: お茶でも飲みましょうか。

Hiragana: おちゃ でも のみましょ う か。

English: Shall we drink tea or something?

Common Mistakes: Do not write 'がでも' or 'をでも'. Particles が and を are dropped when adding でも to a noun.

Memory Tip: Imagine でも as a signpost pointing to a secondary road or backup suggestion.

PARTICLE: など - ET CETERA / AND THE LIKE



Grammatical Function:

Means 'et cetera', 'and so on', or 'and the like'. Often combined with や to specify an open list.

Pattern: Noun (or list with や) + など

Example:

Japanese: 野菜や果物などを食べます。

Hiragana: やさい や くだもの など を たべます。

English: I eat vegetables, fruits, and the like.

Common Mistakes: など is more formal than や. Do not use to refer to specific people in a respectful context.

Memory Tip: Think of など as the 'etc.' label at the end of a long checklist.

Confusing Particle Comparisons – Part 1

1. は (wa) vs が (ga) – Topic vs Subject

- ・ **は** (Topic Marker) introduces a topic that is already known to the speaker and listener. It emphasizes the **action or description** that follows.
- ・ **が** (Subject Marker) introduces a new subject or emphasizes the **subject itself**. It acts like a pointer saying: 'This specific person/thing is the one!'

Visual Nuance Comparison:

- ・ 私は学生です (Watashi wa gakusei desu) = As for me, I am a student. (Focus is on 'student')
- ・ 私が学生です (Watashi ga gakusei desu) = I am the student (the specific person you asked for). (Focus is on 'I')

2. に (ni) vs で (de) – Target vs Action Location

- ・ **に** indicates a **point of existence** (where something exists) or the **destination** of motion. Use it with verbs like いる (exist), ある (exist), and 行く (go).
- ・ **で** indicates the **location of an active event** (where an action happens). Use it with action verbs like 食べる (eat), 勉強する (study), and 買う (buy).

Visual Comparison Table:

Feature	に (ni)	で (de)
Grammar Role	Destination / Static Location	Active Location / Tool or Method
Typical Verbs	いる, ある, 行く, 来る, 住む	食べる, 勉強する, 買う, 働く
Example Sentences	日本に住んでいます。 (I live in Japan.)	日本で英語を教えます。 (I teach English in Japan.)

Confusing Particle Comparisons – Part 2

3. へ (e) vs に (ni) – Direction vs Destination

- ・ **へ (e)** is used to show the **general direction of travel** (towards a location). It acts like a compass vector, focusing on the path or journey.
- ・ **に (ni)** is the **precise destination marker**. It highlights the actual arrival at the endpoint.
- ・ ***Note:*** You can say 日本へ行きます or 日本に行きます. However, you can **only** say テーブルの上に (on top of the table) for existence. You cannot say テーブルの上へ.

4. と (to) vs や (ya) – Complete vs Incomplete Lists

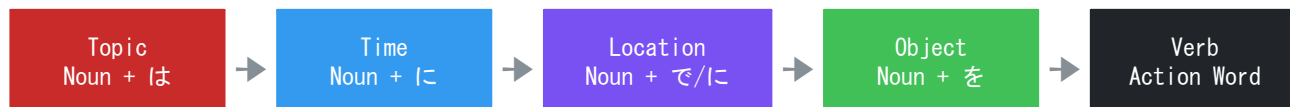
- ・ **と (to)** lists **every single item** in the group. If you mention 'AとB', those are the only two items.
- ・ **や (ya)** lists **examples** of a larger category. 'AやB' suggests: 'A and B, and other things like them.'
- ・ ***Example:***
 - 机の上に本とペンがあります (Only books and pens are on the desk).
 - 机の上に本やペンがあります (Books and pens are on the desk, along with other items like notebook/ruler).

5. は (wa) vs も (mo) – Topic vs Also

- ・ **は (wa)** establishes a unique topic and contrasts it from other possibilities.
- ・ **も (mo)** establishes that the current noun is **also included** in the established category.
- ・ ***Example:***
 - 私は寿司を食べます (As for me, I will eat sushi).
 - 私も寿司を食べます (I will also eat sushi, just like the others).

Visual Grammar Maps & Sentence Structures

Understanding standard Japanese sentence syntax helps place particles in the correct order. Study this flowchart below:



Real-Life Japanese Example Grid



At School (学校で)
教室で日本語を勉強します。
(Study Japanese in the classroom.)



At Work (会社で)
九時にパソコンで仕事をします。
(Work with a computer at 9 o'clock.)



At Home (うちで)
居間に犬と猫がいます。
(There is a dog and cat in the living room.)



Traveling (旅行)
東京から京都まで新幹線へ行きます。
(Go towards Kyoto from Tokyo by Shinkansen.)



Shopping (買い物)
デパートで服や靴を買いました。
(Bought clothes, shoes, etc. at the store.)



Restaurants (レストラン)
レストランでコーヒーも飲みますね。
(I will drink coffee at the restaurant too, right?)

Common Particle Mistakes & Corrections

1. Missing Particles (Particle Dropping)

While native speakers sometimes drop particles in casual, spoken Japanese (e.g. Sake nomu? instead of Sake o nomu?), **omitting particles in formal, written, or JLPT exam contexts is a major error**.

Always ensure your particles are present to explicitly mark grammatical functions.

2. Confusing に and で with Motion Verbs

Learners often assume that any physical action requires **で**. However, if you are arriving at, entering, or sitting on something, the **endpoint destination (に)** must be used instead.

- **Incorrect:** 電車**で**乗ります (I board the train).
- **Correct:** 電車**に**乗ります (I board onto the train).

3. Literal English Translations

English prepositions do not map 1:1 to Japanese particles. For example, 'to meet a friend' uses 'meet' (会う) in Japanese. Because you meet **with** or **face** them, the particle **に** (or **と**) is required, not を.

- **Incorrect:** 友達**を**会います (I meet a friend).
- **Correct:** 友達**に**会います (I meet [with] a friend).

Incorrect vs. Correct Particle Usage Tables

Incorrect Sentence	Correct Sentence	Grammar Explanation
私は毎日日本語を勉強する。 (Correct)	私は毎日日本語が勉強する。 (Incorrect)	勉強する is a transitive verb, so it requires direct object を, not subject が.
日本で行きたいです。 (Incorrect)	日本に/へ行きたいです。 (Correct)	行きたい is a verb of movement, requiring destination particle に or へ, not action で.
猫だけありません。 (Incorrect)	猫しかありません。 (Correct)	Only/nothing but with a negative verb must use しか, not だけ.
車に乗ります。 (Incorrect)	車に乗ります。 (Correct)	Boarding/getting into a vehicle indicates a target destination, requiring に.

Practice Exercises

Part 1: Fill in the Missing Particle

Fill in the blanks with the correct Japanese particles (は, が, を, に, で, と, も, の).

1. 私は明日、図書館_____ 行きます。(I will go to the library tomorrow.)
2. 今日は食堂_____ ご飯を食べました。(I ate rice at the cafeteria today.)
3. この辞書は私_____ です。(This dictionary is mine.)
4. 机の上にノート_____ ペンなどがあります。(There are notebooks, pens, etc., on the desk.)
5. 友達_____ 映画を見ました。(I watched a movie with my friend.)

Part 2: Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct particle to complete the sentence.

1. 猫_____ 好きですか。(Do you like cats?)
a) を b) が c) は d) に
2. ビール_____ 飲みましょうか。(Shall we drink beer or something?)
a) でも b) しか c) の d) へ
3. 財布に千円_____ ありません。(I only have 1000 yen in my wallet.)
a) だけ b) しか c) でも d) も

Part 3: Sentence Correction

Identify the incorrect particle in the sentence and rewrite it correctly.

1. 毎朝、パン**が**食べます。 -> Correction: [_____]
2. 来週、友達**を**会います。 -> Correction: [_____]
3. スーパー**に**パンを買いました。 -> Correction: [_____]

Part 4: Translation Practice

Translate the following English sentences into Japanese using the correct particles:

1. I will study Japanese from 9 o'clock until 12 o'clock.
2. She also went towards Kyoto.
3. This is a book of my friend.

Answer Key & Explanations

Part 1: Fill in the Missing Particle

1. **に** (or **へ**): Marks destination / target of travel.
2. **で**: Marks location of an active event (eating rice).
3. **の**: Indicates possession (mine / my book).
4. **や**: Connects nouns in an incomplete list (notebooks, pens, etc.).
5. **と**: Indicates the companion doing the action together (with a friend).

Part 2: Multiple Choice Questions

1. **b) が**: The adjective 好き (like) always requires the subject marker が, not を.
2. **a) でも**: Used to make a casual suggestion ('beer or something').
3. **b) しか**: Pairs with negative verb ありません to indicate exclusivity ('only/nothing but').

Part 3: Sentence Correction

1. Change **が** to **を**: 食べます is a transitive action, requiring the object marker を.
Correct: 毎朝、パン**を**食べます。
2. Change **を** to **に**: The verb 会う (meet) requires target particle に or companion と.
Correct: 来週、友達**に**会います。
3. Change **に** to **で**: Buying is an active verb, requiring location particle で.
Correct: スーパー**で**パンを買いました。

Part 4: Translation Practice

1. 九時**から**十二時**まで**日本語**を**勉強します。
(Use から for starting point, まで for limit point, and を for direct object.)
2. 彼女**も**京都**へ**行きました。
(Use も for inclusion 'also', and へ or に for direction.)
3. これは友達**の**本です。
(Use の to link owner to property.)

JLPT Particle Tips & NihongoDoya Study Methods

1. JLPT Exam Target Guidelines (N5 vs N4)

- **JLPT N5 Particles**: Focus on the core 10 particles (は, が, を, に, へ, で, と, も, の, か). Verify destination vs location rules and possessive modifiers. These cover 90% of N5 syntax questions.
- **JLPT N4 Particles**: Focus on nuances and sentence endings (ね, よ, や, しか, でも, など). Pay special attention to particles paired with specific verb endings (e.g. しか + negative, で as tools, と as quoting).

2. Rote Memorization vs. Natural Parsing

Do not learn particles as isolated vocab words (e.g., memorizing 'de = at'). Learn particles **together with short, natural verbs/clauses**. For example:

- Memorize `電車に乗る` (get on a train) as a single chunk to link に directly to 乗る in your brain.
- Memorize `レストランで食べる` (eat at a restaurant) to link で directly to active locations.

3. Recommended Review Schedule

To internalize particles, use active production:

- **Day 1**: Study particle rules and complete the fill-in exercises in this guide.
- **Day 3**: Write 5 original sentences using target particles and read them out loud.
- **Day 7**: Complete similar comparisons (は vs が, に vs で) to review fine nuances.
- **Day 14**: Translate English passages back to Japanese to ensure correct placement.

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