

Mastering Japanese With Book



Synopsis

Book by Mastering, Foreign Service Institute

Book Information

Audio Cassette

Publisher: Barron's Educational Series; Book and Cassette edition (February 1990)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812076338

ISBN-13: 978-0812076332

Product Dimensions: 11.6 x 9.8 x 1.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,285,170 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #93 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Foreign Language Learning > Japanese #525 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Foreign Languages > Japanese #24645 in Books > Reference > Foreign Language Study & Reference

Customer Reviews

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As expected, would buy again.

I particularly liked how the books and the tapes worked or meshed together as I advanced thru the material. I am still not finished, obviously, but overall I would say that it still competes fairly well with Rosetta Stone. Especially price wise.

I picked this course up to brush up on my (15-year-old) spoken Japanese language skills. I spent a year in Osaka at Kansai Gaidai in '92, so although I had some familiarity with the language, I was definitely rusty and needed a refresher. I picked up the Barron's course because I'd had good experiences with Barron's Spanish course. This course suited my purposes perfectly - although it starts with the basics, it moves fast. The drills are very rapid (much faster than Barron's Spanish course), and I had to review all of them several times, in spite of the fact that I already had a good command of the grammar. One thing that I found interesting was the early introduction of honorifics (ultra-polite speech). When I was studying Japanese at the college level a decade and a half ago,

honorifics were presented at the very end of any course series (if at all). Apparently, they were more common when this course was put together in the 60's... although I found the honorifics drills interesting (and new, to me), I'm not sure how useful they really are to somebody trying to learn Japanese in the 21st century, unless you plan to become the ambassador to Japan or something. My biggest complaint was the accompanying text. All of the dialog is presented in Romaji (Japanese written out in the Roman alphabet), using a strange, very outdated romanization technique. There's really no reason why the dialog and vocabulary couldn't have been presented in Hiragana (native Japanese phonetic writing) - given the bizarre spelling conventions in this book, there were places where a word I knew was presented and I didn't even realize it until I heard the word spoken. Still, although some of the vocabulary was definitely dated, you'll have a good starting point after working through this course.

Please take my review knowing this: In 1976, I earned admission to Sophia University's "Year In Japan" program. My self-directed preparation came from a 1950s lesson book, but an excellent home stay arrangement allowed me to update my antiquated vocabulary and jump from beginner to intermediate level classes after one term. Of course, language skills atrophy without practice, as I discovered on subsequent, short trips to Asia. Recently, I was motivated to resume serious study. Languages evolve, so I was a bit put off by the "February 1990" copyright date of Barron's "Mastering Japanese: Hear It, Speak It, Read It, Write It," but at least, I thought, it would be an improvement over my 1970s texts. I was wrong. Barron's merely wrapped a new cover on a 1963 university text. As for reading and writing Japanese, the introduction (p. xv) clearly states, "This textbook is concerned only with spoken Japanese." Everything is written - seemingly by typewriter - in one of the Roman alphabet schemes long since abandoned. The introduction also makes it clear that the text was designed specifically for classroom use, rather than "at your own pace, in your spare time" as claimed by Barron's. In short, this is a repack of old material. I commend the textbook's admonition that each lesson "requires many hours of class work supplemented by outside study and, if possible, laboratory work." No one should pretend that it is easy to learn Japanese. A downfall of many, more modern courses, is the claim that learning can be quick and painless, a claim "proven" by teaching a large vocabulary of Japanese words adopted from English. Barron's "Mastering Japanese" does not do this. But if one is going to put forth hours of effort, one should invest in a course that teaches contemporary Japanese. This is not it.

First, to set the record straight, Japan indeed has changed a lot since this course was issued. I

believe the course was produced in the mid-60's...Language education has changed too...That said, different people learn in different ways, and if you're not a really good "traditional text book" type learner... and have trouble with structure and focus, this course is a godsend. The method, basically are drills... repetition, substitution, response, expansion... drills that get you learning basic sentence patterns then changing the sentences around based on various cues. Another interesting point of the course is that even though grammar is explained, it is not taught separately, but rather demonstrated then integrated into the speaking/listening exercises. The title of the course is misleading: The course teaches you HOW TO SPEAK IT and HOW TO WRITE IT... however, unless things have changes, the course on writing and reading are separate. (In fact, what made this course unique was the fact that it kept speaking and listening totally separate from reading and writing -- a common problem with old courses that confused learning to read and write with learning to speak a language.) So just how far will the course get you? Well, don't expect to be able to follow the movies or TV news... you will however be able to get around with an unfortunately caveat... Japanese has become way simpler since the course was recorded a book like JAPANESE FOR BUSY PEOPLE might cut to the chase much quicker... however, it does not offer this method - - which incidentally is similar to an English Text Book by Molinsky and Bliss called SIDE BY SIDE (a book that virtually every English teacher in Japan has taught from and come to hate or love over the years.) All in all - - if you're expecting gimmicks, topical relevance and ultra-modernity... forget it. And if you want something that's colorful and quirky, forget that too... If you want to get the basic structure of the language down and just aren't so good with standard texts... its a method that's a godsend and works... DO NOT however make the mistake I did: Learn hiragana and katakana from the get go... No, don't use it to learn to "speak", however, with hiragana and katakana you can learn more from the environment while living in Japan and take advantage of other learning opportunities. As a side note, I really believe the course deserves to be revisited, revised and recorded for our modern times... the method is solid and doesn't deserve to fall into obscurity.

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