

I've been studying Japanese now for more than 4 years. First, I studied Japanese at my university. I took one year of Japanese lessons before coming to Japan to be an ALT. When I got here, I had no idea what was going on. I realized that even one year of Japanese was not enough to get by in Japan!

When I first arrived, I studied Japanese very hard. There were so many things I needed to learn in order to live more easily in Japan. I wanted to be able to call the post office to have my packages re-delivered. I wanted to be able to understand the details about renting a car, or getting a new cell phone plan. But most of all, I wanted to be able to talk with people easily in Japanese. I studied often in my free time at school, as well as in my free time at home. It took a lot of time, but it was easy to be motivated. I often noticed people around me using the same words and grammar patterns that I had studied in the same week. Things were reinforced easily and I was getting better at Japanese all the time.

After my first year in Japan, I was more comfortable speaking in Japanese, but I still had many more things to learn. I started to study kanji more seriously, so that I could take level 2 of the Japanese proficiency test, and suddenly I found that I could understand lots of Japanese words, announcements and kanji in daily life. It was very exciting! I passed my proficiency test and as time went on, I felt more and more comfortable speaking Japanese. It got to the point where I didn't have so many problems expressing my ideas. I could easily understand what people were saying to me, and usually knew enough Japanese to respond and have a fairly simple conversation. It was easy for me to survive in Japanese society, so little by little I stopped studying Japanese so often.

This brings me to now. I don't speak Japanese so often, since teachers and students at my school want to speak in English and most of my friends are other ALTs. I usually know most of the words that I need to do most things in daily life, so I don't feel a real pressing need to study all the time. But this year, in order to motivate myself to study Japanese more, I am taking level 1 of that same proficiency test. I really like studying (believe it or not) but I have found it hard to stay motivated to learn many new and complicated words that I don't hear every day. Most of the kanji are very difficult and hard to use, so I have been easily discouraged from studying as regularly as I used to. But just yesterday I learned an interesting phrase, 罰が当たる. Today, not 24 hours later, I had the perfect opportunity to use it in an email to a friend as a joke. I didn't think that I would have a chance to say that for a long time, but suddenly it was very useful. I realized that even complicated words that are very difficult to use shouldn't be so hard to learn. I still have almost three months before the test so hopefully I can spend that time learning to enjoy all the parts of Japanese that are 紛らわしい.