

Lesson 1

Study the following sentences:

これは本です。

それは何ですか。

これはえんぴつです。

それはペンですか。

ええ、そうです。

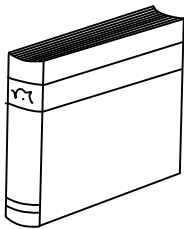
はい、これはペンです。

あれはノートですか。

いいえ、あれはノートではありません。本です。

いいえ、そうではありません。あれは本です。

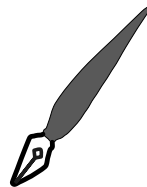
これは何ですか。



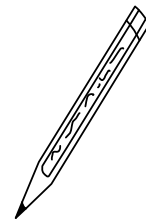
本



ノート



ペン



えんぴつ



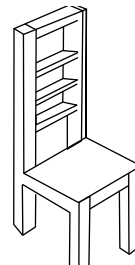
かぎ



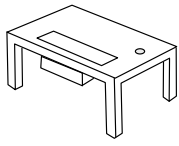
ふで



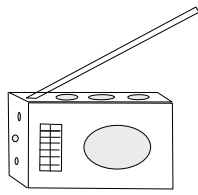
めがね



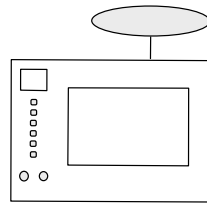
いす



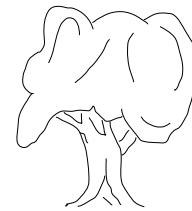
つくえ



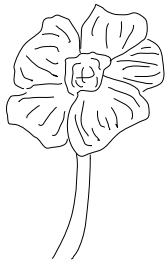
ラジオ



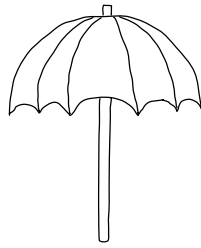
テレビ



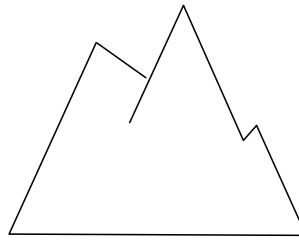
木



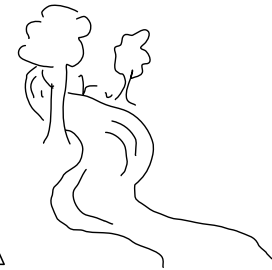
花



かさ



山



川

Comment

The first set of utterances you will learn are simple statements which either describe a series of objects or ask what they are. For this you will need to know words for 'this' and 'that', a few nouns, the topic marker, and the word for 'is'. Remember that the word-order of a typical Japanese sentence is subject-object-verb. Try to act out the sentences as you say them. The style here is in the normal polite form. Note that here, in the very first lesson, three different writing systems are already in use.

<i>kanji</i>	本	<i>hon</i>
<i>katakana</i>	ペン	<i>pen</i>
<i>hiragana</i>	つくえ	<i>tsukue</i>

You are being introduced to the written language more or less 'as it is' from the very beginning. It will look daunting to you at first but you will get used to it quite quickly. You should not attempt to begin, however, without having first ensured that you can read *hiragana* at the very least with ease.

1.1 'This thing' and 'that thing'

これは本です。
それはえんぴつです。

これ is a demonstrative noun; meaning 'this thing here'. Japanese nouns are extremely simple compared to nouns in most European languages: they are uninflected for either gender or number and they retain their form wherever they occur in the sentence. This is *one* area where Japanese will cause you no trouble. これ forms a set of three such words together with それ 'that thing there' and あれ 'that thing over there'. The distinction between these is felt to be strong in Japanese and you should try to use them correctly from the very beginning. One usually responds with これ to a question containing それ, and with それ to a question containing これ. あれ is employed when two people involved in a conversation are equally distant from the object.

1.2 The particle は

は is a particle which, like all such particles in Japanese, follows the word to which it refers and is pronounced together with that word. Note that it is written irregularly with は, the *kana* for *ha*, although it is pronounced *wa*. It has a number of uses: _

- (a) it marks the topic or theme of the sentence
- (b) it implies a contrast

In most of the sentences in this lesson it is operating as a topic or theme marker, subduing the word to which it is attached and shifting attention elsewhere. You will see later how the concept of topic/theme differs from that of subject. Here, the important thing to notice is that the word governed by は, namely これ, is already within the world of discourse. The word is marked off as a topic, and what follows is a statement, which can be either a question, a remark, or some new information about the topic.

1.3 The copula

です is the copula, a type of word which will probably be new to you. Although it is usually translated as 'is', it has certain unique properties, which distinguish it from the Japanese verb proper. It cannot, for example, stand on its own; and so it is best to think of it as a separate category. It has nothing to do with 'existence' and its basic meaning is that of equivalence: $A = B$, A 'is' B. This is very important to grasp at this early stage, because the English verb 'to be' is used for both existence and equivalence. In Japanese you must keep these two concepts clearly distinguished. Note that the noun that precedes the copula does not need a particle. Note also that the final *u* in です is usually reduced to a whisper: *desu*.

1.4 Asking a question

それは何ですか。
これはえんぴつです。

何 (なん) is an interrogative noun meaning 'what?' か is a sentence-final particle indicating that a question is being asked. It is normally pronounced with a slight rise in pitch. The word order here is: *noun – topic marker – noun – copula*. To make a sentence into an interrogative, one either replaces the noun before the copula with the interrogative noun 何, adding か at the end, as in the first example, or one simply adds か as in あれはノートですか 'Is that a notebook?' No change in word order is needed. Note that the pattern of statement and response is far more regular in the Japanese than in the English.

これは何ですか。

What is this? (*lit.* As for this thing here, what is (it)?)

それは本です。

That is a book. (*lit.* As for that thing there, book is.)

1.5 'Yes'

それはペンですか。	はい、これはペンです。 ええ、そうです。
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はい means 'yes' but its use is fairly limited in daily conversation. Expect to hear the more colloquial ええ more often, particularly from women. Although one usually translates はい/ええ as 'yes', it is important to recognise that in actual usage the meaning is closer to 'I understand' or 'I am following you'. It is often used on the telephone as a kind of interjection, the main function of which is to reassure the other party that you are still on the line and listening. You must not therefore always interpret はい/ええ as an affirmative statement: the possibilities for misunderstanding are infinite. When responding to a question with more than just はい/ええ, one can either repeat the question minus the question marker か, or one can substitute the word そう, meaning 'correct' or 'so'.

1.6 'No'

あれはノートですか。 いいえ、あれはノートではありません。 いいえ、そうではありません。
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いいえ means 'no'. For a negative response the copula です now has to be cast into its negative form, ではありません, which you will often find being contracted to じゃありません. Keep in mind, however, that じゃ is only used in spoken Japanese and that では is obligatory when writing. You will have noticed that the negative form of the copula involves another は. は is being used here not as a topic marker but as a marker implying contrast, and this will be discussed in more detail later. For the time being, just learn ではありません as a unit and register the fact that は is often employed in negative sentences in this way.

Key to sentences

Romanisation

Kore wa hon desu.

Sore wa nan desu ka.

Kore wa enpitsu desu.

Sore wa pen desu ka.

E, so desu.

Hai, kore wa pen desu.

Are wa nōto desu ka.

Iie, are wa nōto de wa arimasen. Hon desu.

Iie, sō de wa arimasen. Are wa hon desu.

Kore wa nan desu ka.

Translation

This is a book.

What is that?

This is a pencil.

Is that a pen?

Yes, it is.

Yes, this is a pen.

Is that a notebook?

No, that is not a notebook. It's a book.

No, it's not. That's a book.

What is this?
