

Japanese For Gringos Lesson 2 Courtesy Essentials 2026 10 04

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Maya: Konnichiwa, and welcome back to Japanese for Gringos! I'm Maya.

Devon: And I'm Devon. Lesson two today, and it's the most powerful lesson of the whole trip: courtesy essentials. Five phrases that open every door in Japan.

Maya: These are the phrases you'll use fifty times a day, Devon. Ready?

Devon: Ready. Phrase one. Thank you very much. Arigatou gozaimasu. Say ah-ree-gah-toh goh-zah-ee-mahss.

Maya: The short casual version is just arigatou, but as a traveler, always use the full one. Ah-ree-gah-toh goh-zah-ee-mahss. Tip: that toh is long. Ah-ree-gah-TOH. Stretch it, and you're suddenly polite instead of casual.

Devon: Phrase two, and Maya, this one scares people. You're welcome. Dou itashimashite. Say doh ee-tah-shee-mahsh-teh.

Maya: You will almost never need to say this, because Japanese people rarely say you're welcome. They just smile and bow. Tip: if you must say it, keep it soft and fast. Doh ee-tah-shee-mahsh-teh, one gentle breath. Bonus tip: a deep nod works just as well.

Devon: Phrase three. The Swiss army knife of Japanese. Sumimasen. Say soo-mee-mah-sehn.

Maya: Sumimasen means excuse me, sorry, and thank you all at once. Bump into someone: sumimasen. Get a waiter's attention: sumimasen. Someone lets you pass: sumimasen. Tip: the sehn rhymes with ten, not seen. Soo-mee-mah-sehn.

Devon: Phrase four. Please, when you're asking for something. Onegaishimasu. Say oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahss.

Maya: You attach it to requests. Kore, onegaishimasu, means this one, please. Tip: it's the second half of yoroshiku onegaishimasu from lesson one, so you already half know it. Oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahss.

Devon: Phrase five. It's fine, or I'm okay. Daijoubu. Say dah-ee-joh-boo.

Maya: Someone asks if you need help and you're fine: daijoubu. Also great for reassuring a worried shopkeeper. Tip: the joh rhymes with go, and the boo is short. Dah-ee-joh-boo, flat and even, remember our drumbeat rule.

Devon: Demo time. We're at a little ramen shop in Tokyo. Maya, you're the customer, I'm the server.

Maya: Sumimasen. Kore, onegaishimasu.

Devon: Hai, douzo. Here you go. Omatase shimashita.

Maya: Arigatou gozaimasu.

Devon: And she used three of today's phrases in one perfect exchange. Sumimasen to get my attention, onegaishimasu to order politely, and arigatou gozaimasu to thank me.

Maya: Cultural note. In Japan, politeness is not optional decoration. It's the whole game. Saying thank you to the cashier, the taxi driver, the train attendant.

Devon: Hit me.

Maya: How do you say thank you very much?

Devon: Arigatou gozaimasu. Ah-ree-gah-toh goh-zah-ee-mahss.

Maya: How do you say excuse me or sorry?

Devon: Sumimasen. Soo-mee-mah-sehn.

Maya: And how do you say please when making a request?

Devon: Onegaishimasu. Oh-neh-gah-ee-shee-mahss.

Maya: Beautiful. You now hold the five keys to politeness in Japan. Next lesson, numbers one through twenty, and watch out, four is trouble. Sah-yoh-nah-rah, friends.

Devon: Sah-yoh-nah-rah. Sumimasen, arigatou gozaimasu, practice them all day.