

Japanese For Gringos Lesson 3 Numbers 120 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 three, and today we're conquering numbers one through twenty, the gringo superpower in Japan.

Maya: Prices, platform numbers, hotel rooms, ramen bowls. Everything you hear is just numbers. Ready?

Devon: Born ready. One through five. Ichi, ni, san, yon, go. Say ee-chee, nee, sahn, yohn, goh.

Maya: Now the classic gringo trap. The number four has two readings, shi and yon. Always say yon, yohn. Because shi also means death, and saying shi at a market gets you looks. Tip: just forget shi exists. Four is yohn, period.

Devon: Six through ten next. Roku, say roh koo. Nana, like the start of banana. Hachi, hah like laughter, then chee. Kyuu, hold the oo, kyoo. Juu, hold the oo, joo.

Maya: Another trap, and the same one as number four. The number seven also has two readings, shichi and nana. Say nana, nice and easy, like the start of banana. It is the traveler safe one, and it is easier anyway. Tip: those double o sounds are long vowels. Hold them twice as long.

Devon: Quick review, Maya. One through ten with me. Ichi, ni, san, yon, go. Then roku, nana, hachi, kyuu, juu.

Maya: Ee chee, nee, sahn, yohn, goh, roh koo, nah nah, hah chee, kyoo, joo. Tip: flat rhythm, remember. Every syllable gets the same weight. No English stress.

Devon: Now the teens, eleven through nineteen. They are all just ten plus the number. Listen: joo ee chee, joo nee, joo sahn, joo yohn, joo goh.

Maya: And the rest, sixteen through nineteen. Once more, nice and slow. Joo roh koo, joo nah nah, joo hah chee, joo kyoo.

Devon: Hear the pattern? The word juu, then the number. Learn one through ten, and eleven through nineteen come free.

Maya: And twenty breaks the pattern, it is its own word. Ni-juu. Nee-joo. That is it. Two tens glued into one word.

Devon: Demo time, Maya. We're at a ticket machine in Kyoto buying subway tickets. Go.

Maya: Sumimasen. Ni-juu, onegaishimasu. Two tickets, please.

Devon: Hai. Ni-juu, desu ne. Two tickets.

Maya: And then I hand over money and say, with feeling, arigatou gozaimasu.

Devon: Look at that. Ni-juu from today's lesson, plus sumimasen, onegaishimasu, and arigatou gozaimasu from lessons one and two. It's all stacking.

Maya: Cultural note. In Japan, numbers are also said out loud everywhere. The cashier will announce your total. The train conductor will call out the platform. And here's a fun one: some buildings skip the fourth floor because of that shi death thing we talked about. You'll see floors labeled one, two, three, five. Numbers

Devon: Ni-juu. Nee-joo.

Maya: Perfect. One through twenty is yours now. Next lesson, we go bigger: twenty to one hundred, plus money and prices, because those yen signs are coming at you fast.

Sah-yoh-nah-rah, friends.

Devon: Sah-yoh-nah-rah. Ichi, ni, san, yon, practice out loud all day.