

100 Chinese-Japanese Kanji False Friends

A printable practice bank for Chinese speakers learning Japanese. Same-looking characters can hide very different meanings.

手紙

勉強

丈夫

湯

床

愛人

人參

汽車

机

約束

Use this PDF as a double-check list, not a memorization burden. Start with Part 1, then review five to ten words at a time.

HOW TO USE THIS PDF

Same characters do not always mean the same thing.

Chinese and Japanese writing share many characters, but a familiar-looking kanji word can still mean something different in Japanese. This PDF gives you 100 traps to review as a Chinese speaker learning Japanese.

Important note for simplified Chinese readers: some Japanese kanji match traditional Chinese forms more closely than simplified Chinese. When helpful, the simplified form appears in parentheses.

Meaning note: Chinese meanings focus on common Modern Standard Mandarin usage. Regional, Cantonese, Taiwanese, classical, or specialized meanings may differ.

Suggested review loop

- Read the kanji first. Guess the Japanese meaning before looking right.
- Say the Japanese reading out loud.
- Mark words that surprised you. Those are your real review targets.
- Turn 10 at a time into flashcards. Do not try to memorize all 100 in one sitting.

Legend

- **Must-Know:** classic traps that are easy to remember and easy to misuse.
- **Everyday:** words you may see in study, travel, reading, or daily life.
- **Study/Work:** useful in school, office, media, or names.
- **Advanced:** good dictionary-check words. Learn them slowly.

Part 1 - 20 Must-Know Traps

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
1	手紙	てがみ	letter; written message	toilet paper (simplified: 手纸)
2	勉強	べんきょう	study; learning	reluctantly; forced; barely enough (simplified: 勉强)
3	丈夫	じょうぶ	sturdy; strong; healthy	husband; adult man
4	大丈夫	だいじょうぶ	okay; all right; safe	great man; man of character
5	湯	ゆ	hot water; bath water; hot spring water	soup; broth
6	床	ゆか	floor	bed
7	愛人	あいじん	lover; mistress; extramarital partner	spouse or lover, depending on region/context (simplified: 爱人)
8	人参	にんじん	carrot	ginseng
9	老婆	ろうば	old woman	wife, informal
10	大家	おおや	landlord; landlady	everyone; expert/master

Part 1 - 20 Must-Know Traps

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
11	新聞	しんぶん	newspaper	news (simplified: 新闻)
12	汽車	きしゃ	steam train; train	car; motor vehicle
13	机	つくえ	desk; table	machine; opportunity (simplified form of 機)
14	私	わたし	I; me	private; personal; selfish
15	先生	せんせい	teacher; doctor; respected professional	Mr.; sir; polite title
16	走	はしる	to run	to walk
17	腕	うで	arm; skill	wrist
18	首	くび	neck	head; first; leader
19	小人	こびと	dwarf; little person	petty person; morally small person
20	邪魔	じゃま	hindrance; nuisance; in the way	evil spirit; demon

Part 2 - Everyday Vocabulary Traps

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
21	迷惑	めいわく	trouble; nuisance; annoyance	confused; puzzled
22	暗算	あんざん	mental arithmetic	to plot against secretly
23	約束	やくそく	promise; appointment	restriction; to restrain (simplified: 约束)
24	結束	けっそく	unity; solidarity	to end; finish (simplified: 结束)
25	結構	けっこう	fine; quite; enough; no thanks	structure (simplified: 结构)
26	結局	けっきょく	after all; in the end	ending; outcome (simplified: 结局)
27	検討	けんとう	consideration; examination	self-criticism; review of mistakes (simplified: 检讨)
28	交代	こうたい	changeover; taking turns	explain; account for; entrust
29	看病	かんびょう	nursing; caring for a sick person	see a doctor; treat a patient
30	工夫	くふう	ingenuity; device; clever solution	time; effort; skill

Part 2 - Everyday Vocabulary Traps

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
31	切手	きって	postage stamp	cutting one's hand
32	階段	かいだん	stairs; staircase	stage; phase (simplified: 阶段)
33	合同	ごうどう	joint; combined	contract
34	便宜	べんぎ	convenience; accommodation	cheap; inexpensive
35	皮肉	ひにく	irony; sarcasm	skin and flesh
36	交番	こうばん	police box	taking turns; rotation
37	放心	ほうしん	dazed; absent-minded	feel relieved; stop worrying
38	覚悟	かくご	readiness; mental resolve	realization; awakening (simplified: 觉悟)
39	必死	ひっし	desperate; frantic	must die; certain death
40	告訴	こくそ	legal complaint; to sue	to tell; inform (simplified: 告诉)

Part 2 - Everyday Vocabulary Traps

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
41	用意	ようい	preparation; getting ready	intention; purpose
42	方便	ほうべん	expedient; means	convenient
43	方面	ほうめん	direction; area toward	aspect; field
44	服役	ふくえき	serving a prison sentence	military service
45	非常	ひじょう	emergency; extraordinary	very; extremely
46	風船	ふうせん	balloon	sailing ship; wind-propelled boat
47	敷衍	ふえん	elaboration; expansion	perfunctory; to gloss over
48	該当	がいとう	to correspond to; apply to	should; ought to (simplified: 该当)
49	格式	かくしき	formality; social rules	format; model
50	工作	こうさく	craftwork; construction; secret activity	work; job

Part 3 - Study, Work and Daily Life

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
51	故事	こじ	historical anecdote; old story/ proverb	story
52	貴方	あなた	you	your honored side; formal “your side” (simplified: 贵方)
53	何人	なんにん	how many people	who
54	花子	はなこ	female given name	beggar
55	経理	けいり	accounting; financial affairs	manager; to manage (simplified: 经理)
56	開会	かいかい	opening a meeting	hold a meeting (simplified: 开会)
57	楽	らく	comfort; ease	happy; cheerful (simplified: 乐)
58	連帯	れんたい	solidarity	to be related; to involve (simplified: 连带)
59	旅館	りょかん	traditional Japanese inn; ryokan	hotel (simplified: 旅馆)
60	律師	りっし	Buddhist priest	lawyer (simplified: 律师)

Part 3 - Study, Work and Daily Life

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
61	麻雀	マージャン	mahjong	sparrow in Mandarin
62	馬鹿	ばか	idiot; stupid	horse and deer; red deer (simplified: 马鹿)
63	馬上	ばじょう	on horseback	immediately; right away (simplified: 马上)
64	名字	みょうじ	family name; surname	given name; name
65	模様	もよう	pattern; design	appearance; look (simplified: 模样)
66	目前	もくぜん	right before one's eyes	currently; at present
67	棚	たな	shelf	shed
68	匹	ひき	counter for small animals	counter for horses
69	票	ひょう	vote; ballot	ticket
70	平和	へいわ	peace	gentle; mild

Part 3 - Study, Work and Daily Life

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
71	前年	ぜんねん	previous year; last year	the year before last
72	親友	しんゆう	close friend	relatives and friends (simplified: 亲友)
73	青	あお	blue; greenish-blue	green; blue-green
74	情報	じょうほう	information	intelligence; secret information (simplified: 情报)
75	麒麟	きりん	giraffe	qilin, a mythical beast

Part 4 - Advanced / Dictionary-Check Words

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
76	汽水	きすい	brackish water	soda; soft drink
77	求人	きゅうじん	job recruitment; help wanted	ask someone for help
78	上場	じょうじょう	stock-market listing	enter a stage or venue (simplified: 上场)
79	上手	じょうず	skillful; good at	to start; get started
80	蛇口	じゃぐち	faucet; tap	Shekou, a place name in Shenzhen
81	師弟	してい	teacher and disciple	junior fellow disciple (simplified: 师弟)
82	士官	しかん	commissioned officer	non-commissioned officer
83	時計	とけい	clock; watch	timer (simplified: 時計)
84	小心	しょうしん	timidity; cowardice	careful; be careful
85	書類	しゅるい	documents; official papers	book category (simplified: 书类)

Part 4 - Advanced / Dictionary-Check Words

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
86	手袋	てぶくろ	glove; mitten	handbag
87	手心	てごころ	discretion; consideration; leniency	palm of the hand
88	土産	みやげ	souvenir	local product; specialty (simplified: 土产)
89	外人	がいじん	foreigner	outsider
90	外遇	がいぐう	chance encounter	extramarital affair
91	王妃	おうひ	queen consort	princess consort
92	温存	おんぞん	preservation; keeping something intact	gentle; mild
93	聞	きく	listen; ask	smell; sniff (simplified: 闻)
94	文句	もんく	complaint	wording; phrase in a text
95	信号	しんごう	traffic light; signal	signal; cue (simplified: 信号)

Part 4 - Advanced / Dictionary-Check Words

#	Kanji	Japanese Reading	Japanese Meaning	Common Chinese Meaning
96	住所	じゅうしょ	address	residence; dwelling; domicile
97	中古	ちゅうこ	secondhand; used item	the Middle Ages
98	高等学校	こうとうがっこう	high school	institution of higher learning (simplified: 高等学校)
99	浴衣	ゆかた	yukata; light summer kimono	bathrobe
100	天井	てんじょう	ceiling	courtyard; atrium

MINI QUIZ

Can you catch the trap?

Cover the answer key first. Choose the Japanese meaning, not the Chinese meaning.

手紙

In Japanese, does this mean “letter” or “toilet paper”?

勉強

In Japanese, does this mean “study” or “reluctantly”?

湯

In Japanese, is this “hot water” or “soup”?

大家

In Japanese, is this “landlord” or “everyone”?

約束

In Japanese, is this “promise” or “restriction”?

暗算

In Japanese, is this “mental arithmetic” or “secret plot”?

階段

In Japanese, is this “stairs” or “stage/phase”?

馬上

In Japanese, is this “on horseback” or “immediately”?

手袋

In Japanese, is this “gloves” or “handbag”?

天井

In Japanese, is this “ceiling” or “courtyard”?

Check your answers and find more traps.

Answer key

1. 手紙 - letter
2. 勉強 - study
3. 湯 - hot water
4. 大家 - landlord
5. 約束 - promise
6. 暗算 - mental arithmetic
7. 階段 - stairs
8. 馬上 - on horseback
9. 手袋 - gloves
10. 天井 - ceiling

Copy this prompt

I'm a Chinese speaker learning Japanese. Give me 10 kanji or kanji compounds that look identical in Chinese and Japanese but have a different meaning in each language. For each one, give the kanji, the Japanese reading, the Japanese meaning, and the Chinese meaning. Skip any example you're not confident is accurate.

Tip: use AI to discover candidates, then verify each one with a Japanese dictionary and a Chinese dictionary before adding it to your study list.

KEEP LEARNING

Turn this list into real memory.

False friends are memorable only after you test yourself. Pick 10 words, hide the meanings, and recall the Japanese reading and meaning from memory.

Read the full guide:

<https://rachelwithai.com/chinese-vs-japanese-writing/>

Make flashcards from this list:

<https://rachelwithai.com/free-quizlet-alternative/>

Source and accuracy note

This study PDF was compiled from common learner examples and checked against Chinese-Japanese false-friend references, including Wiktionary's Appendix: False friends between Chinese and Japanese and Carl Gene Fordham's "35 Common False Friends in Chinese and Japanese." Translations are intentionally short for review; dictionary entries can contain additional meanings and regional usage.