

Student Testimonial: JAPN 10ABC: First Year Japanese

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Taking the JAPN10 series was one of my "bucket list" items for college before graduating, and I'm really glad I pushed myself to finally do it during my senior year. When I visited Tokyo, Japan for the first time this summer, I was surprised by how much Japanese I could speak, read, and hear after just three quarters of hard work. I noticed that the conversations in Japanese around me didn't sound like a "foreign language" to me, but something I could actually hear and understand! Of course, I'm still far from fluent and have a long way to go, but taking the JAPN10 series gave me a strong foundation of the basics to work with. So when I listen to someone speak, I usually can't understand everything—but I often know enough to be able to piece the rest together based on context.

In Japan, it was undoubtedly very helpful to be able to ask for directions and restaurant recommendations without a translation app, but the most rewarding parts of my trip were definitely the basic conversations I had with people. For example, in Hakone, I was relaxing with my mom after soaking in the hot spring, and two kind ladies overheard me reading aloud the katakana label of the ramune-flavored popsicle I was eating. They realized I knew basic Japanese and started conversing with me, and they told me how this popsicle brand is famous in Japan and one of their childhood favorites. In response, I told them how ramune flavor is rather uncommon in America, so I had never tried a ramune-flavored popsicle before this. Later on the trip, I dragged my boyfriend to an Akihabara maid cafe with me for fun. We went in not knowing what to expect, but it turned out to be one of the most memorable experiences of the trip because of our ability to converse in Japanese with the maids. One of the maids noticed my Animal Crossing (「どうぶつの森」) themed backpack, and we bonded over our shared interest in the Nintendo game franchise. We discovered we both played the game on the Nintendo DS as children!

I felt the many hours I had spent practicing my Japanese at UCSD paid off because they enabled chance meetings and personal connections like these to happen. Being able to communicate in basic Japanese has been so fulfilling, and I will continue to learn and practice for this reason!