

Japan has the 2nd largest economy in the world.

Japan is a prosperous country and has the most diverse economy in Asia. With a GDP of \$4.9 trillion in 2005, Japan's economy is 2nd only to that of the U.S. The leading Japanese companies are among the largest, most efficiently run, and most well-known firms in the world. Familiar names like Sony, Toshiba, Sanyo, Casio, Canon, Minolta, Honda, Toyota, Mitsubishi, and many others have infiltrated the world market in a variety of sectors. Whether you're in the field of business, engineering, manufacturing, research, economics, or politics, chances are you will be competing with, if not working for, a Japanese entity.

Knowing Japanese brings business opportunities.

Japanese consumers spend 100s of billions of dollars each year on consumer goods and services like food, clothing, travel, and entertainment. The typical household has over \$100,000 in savings and a disposable monthly income of \$3,800. With all of that cash to spend, it is perhaps not surprising then that the United States exports more goods and services to Japan than any other overseas destination. In 2004, exports to Japan accounted for \$54 billion of the U.S. GDP. In addition to these exports, 1000s of U.S. companies have successful branches in Japan. In 2004 alone, U.S. businesses spent \$78 billion in direct investment in Japan. Being able to communicate with potential customers in their own language is key to winning their business. In addition, when you learn Japanese, you become not only proficient in the language but also gain an insider view of the culture. Understanding the Japanese work ethic, their business etiquette, and knowing which cultural faux pas to avoid can often make or break an important business deal.

Japanese is a gateway to other Asian languages & cultures.

Throughout its history, Japan has been shaped by the influence of Asia's great civilizations: India, China, and Korea. While the cultures of these Asian countries do differ, Asian cultures together share many similarities that differentiate them from Western ways and norms. So a study of Japanese can open your perspective on the values that other Asian nations share with Japan, including religious beliefs, ethics, and aesthetics. A familiarity with Asian cultures also allows you to step outside the culture you live in and see it from a fresh, new perspective.

Japanese-speakers are the Internet's 3rd largest language group.

The Japanese make up the third largest language community on the Internet, after only English and Chinese speakers. An estimated 88 million Japanese, or 9.6% of the world's online population, are connected to the Internet. Knowing Japanese can connect you to these people in an instant. They may just be future friends or acquaintances, business associates, or even the market that you or your future employer hopes to target.

The Japanese are innovators.

Considering that Japan is geographically isolated island nation that is densely populated and poor in natural resources makes the strength of the Japanese economy seem even more impressive. The Japanese have relied on their creativity and scientific know-how to succeed not only economically but also in ecology- and efficiency-oriented ways. The Japanese are known as high tech leaders in fields such as optical media, semiconductor manufacturing, industrial robotics, and fermentation processes. Their drive for innovation has made the Japanese the world leaders in patent filings at 420,000 applications annually.

Japanese cultural exports are exploding.

From anime to sushi bars, karaoke to manga, bonsai to origami, Japanese culture has become part of international culture. A knowledge of the language will give you direct access to Japanese film, animations, and comic books, give you insight into the special terminology used in your favorite martial art, help you understand the cultural basis for kamikaze training and the origin of the samurai warrior, and develop your ability to order sashimi like a native at your favorite Japanese restaurant!

Knowing Japanese will set you apart from the crowd.

The majority of people who learn a foreign language choose a European language like Spanish, French, German, or Italian. Choosing a less commonly learned language will pop out on your resume and differentiate you from the crowd.

The Japanese are international tourists.

With all of the disposable cash in their pockets, 16.8 million Japanese tourists headed to destinations abroad in 2004. In a survey, 94% of Japanese visitors to the U.S. reported shopping during their stay, and more so than any other group, the Japanese were more likely to pay for goods and services in cash. 3.7 million Japanese tourists visited the US in 2004, second only to the British among overseas tourists. Visitors from Japan spent \$12.4 billion in the U.S. in 2004, up 24% from the previous year, and were alone responsible for the majority of the U.S. travel trade surplus.

The market for Japanese tourist dollars is strong. A knowledge of Japanese can gain you entry into that market. Of course, knowing Japanese will make your own visit Japan both easier and much more enjoyable.

It's not as hard as you think!

It's true that Japanese has a much different system of writing than English or any other European language. However, foreigners can get by with learning the 44 or so hiragana

or katakana characters that represent sounds in much the same way as the English alphabet does. In addition, the grammar of Japanese is in many ways simpler than that of European languages. Japanese nouns have no genders, plural forms, or accompanying articles to learn. The language also has only two verb tenses, present and past, and includes very few irregular verbs. Spoken Japanese has only 5 vowel sounds and spelling is phonetically consistent, making the language relatively easy to pronounce.

Japanese is a stepping stone to learning other Asian languages.

Like other languages of Southeast Asia, Japanese is a highly analytical language, relying heavily on function words rather than extensive systems of inflection to denote linguistic properties. These languages also share a similar subject-predicate sentence structure. Though Southeast Asian languages are distinctly different among themselves, as a group they are clearly differentiable from geographically more distant language families, such as Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic languages. In particular, the grammar of Japanese is very similar to that of Korean and both languages have an equally advanced system of honorifics for showing respect. And Japanese takes its kanji writing system from the Chinese system of ideographs. Learning Japanese brings you a step closer to taking on Korean or Chinese because many of the concepts underlying the language are similar.

Some Reasons to Study Japanese

Language is essential for successful communication in an increasingly plural world, both at home and abroad. According to the “Standards for Foreign Language Learning,” a visionary document produced by a committee of business leaders, government officials, and educators, *“The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical.”*

Whether you drawn to Japanese because of your interest in pop culture, politics, art, music, history, or literature, it is good to think about how language learning will shape your academic career at Bowdoin as well as your life beyond it.

Japanese will prepare you for a future career in global business.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.” –Nelson Mandela

As Nelson Mandela perceptively observed about the art of negotiation, it is through language that we truly reach people. According to the USTR, Japan was the fourth largest goods export market for the United States in 2011. For multi-national companies doing business with Japan, it is increasingly important to have employees who can communicate effectively in Japanese.

You will learn about a culture completely different from your own.

Structural features of the Japanese language such as honorific verbs and kinship terms provide a window into cultural axioms that are written into language. Students learning Japanese master the rules of social conduct in Japan simply by speaking Japanese. By doing so, students are also able to reflect on the cultural norms of their own country.

Japanese language classes at Bowdoin integrate elements of both traditional and contemporary culture. In 2012, for example, students enjoyed a museum exhibition on “horror prints” from nineteenth century as well an interactive talk on the Japanese pop star Hatsune Miku.

Japanese language study can build a strong foundation for graduate work in a range of fields.

You would think that those who take Japanese are interested in working in Japan, right? That is not necessarily the case. Recent graduates of Japanese have gone on to pursue graduate work in diverse areas such as Medicine, Political Theory, and Anthropology. Graduate schools are interested in students who can hit the ground running, in terms of scholastic ability and diligence. Japanese classes at Bowdoin offer good preparation for that.

As a recent graduate who applied to medical schools put it, “By including Japanese in my studies, I learned a range of perspectives. In my application to medical school, I want to illustrate that my interests extend beyond math and science topics.”

“ He who does not know foreign languages does not know anything about his own. ~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As you might have observed through your high school second language classes, there is no better way to master the workings of English than to learn the grammar of a foreign language.

The regular pace of a language class can help cultivate study skills that are transferable to other classes.

Learning a language requires you to think about successful study strategies. Language learners typically reflect on whether they are visual or aural learners and build their study methods around their strengths. They also see that consistent effort pays off in language learning and learn to pace themselves in their coursework in other subjects. As one

student observed, “From my own recollections of the study of Japanese, I remember how what little natural ability I have in learning language was often not enough to master grammar and kanji, and my answer to cover that gap, much like in any similar situation, was simply hard dedicated work.”

Learning Japanese allows you to see the world in a different way.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is known to have written this famous aphorism: “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.” As he suggests, our ability to imagine possible worlds are extended by learning a new language. Companies and graduate schools are interested in cultivating talented people who can function in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. Learning a new language is the first step towards “thinking outside the box.”

You will have the opportunity to study away or work in Japan.

The Japanese teachers at Bowdoin strongly encourage study away. You can read about the exciting experiences of students who have recently been away elsewhere.

Many students also go on to teach English in Japan after graduation through the JET Programme. The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme) seeks to help enhance internationalization in Japan, by promoting mutual understanding between Japan and other nations. The programme aims to enhance foreign language education in Japan, and to promote international exchange at the local level through fostering ties between Japanese youth and foreign youth.



The Japanese curriculum is closely integrated with the study of Asia.

Students who study Japanese at the Intermediate Advanced level can count those credits towards an Asian Studies major. The Asian Studies department offers classes on Japanese literature, history, politics, and art. Students can therefore deepen their cultural knowledge of the area in preparation for international work. Student also frequently double major in Asian Studies and Government or Asian Studies and History, integrating their scholastic interests in fascinating ways.

Last but not the least, Japanese is incredibly fun.

As a Japanese learner at Bowdoin, you will take part in range of cultural activities such as tea ceremonies and calligraphy workshops. The teachers here are frequently organizing sushi and movie nights. You will also find them every week at Japanese Language Table

sharing stories from their own lives. I will let a former student speak through his own words.

“ What started as a whim my first year soon turned into one of the best memories I've had at Bowdoin College. Learning Japanese has provided me with enough unique experiences for a lifetime. I've learned to speak, write, and read in a foreign language. And with the help of the professors, I went to Japan to practice all I'd learned. If I could only do it all over again--there's something refreshing about learning a new thing every class. There is a tight knit family that develops out of the Japanese program that I would be very sad to not be a part of. My favorite memory, of course, was going to Japan in the summer of 2006. The school, and especially the sensees, were very helpful in getting me funded through a Freeman Fellowship. Aside from that, making a movie during my second year was funny, and a valuable learning experience. I could go on for quite a bit about how amazing taking Japanese at Bowdoin was in my four years here, but I think it is something people need to do for themselves.”

Why Study Japanese?

Whether you are a fan of *manga* and *anime*, a Japanese film buff, a ninja wannabe, or you just want to know more about the culture that brought us karaoke, karate, and Hello Kitty, studying Japanese is for you. Interest in Japanese continues to grow at BU and the Department has responded by hiring additional faculty and developing one of the most rigorous majors in the country. The focus of the major is on literature and linguistics and covers more than a thousand years' worth of poetry, drama, fiction, as well as film. Majors can also select courses on Japan from outside the department in fields including economics, art history, anthropology, history, and music. Students can opt to live in Japanese House, a Bay State Road brownstone in which students studying Japanese can practice their language skills around the clock.

About Japanese

Studying Japanese means learning a language that is so different from English that it will make you rethink your most basic assumptions about the way language works. It means learning to conjugate your verbs according not just to tense but also to politeness. It means getting used to the idea that adjectives can have a past tense. It means doing without plurals, choosing among dozens of different words for “I,” and learning to wait for the verb until the very end of the sentence. Japanese is difficult in ways that European languages are not, but it is also surprisingly easy in ways that they can be difficult. There is no subjunctive mood to worry about, no grammatical gender, no definite or indefinite articles, and no complex conjugations according to person. It is also extremely easy to pronounce Japanese.

About Japanese literature

From the elegant world of the tenth-century *Tale of Genji* (the world's first novel written by a woman) to the postmodern dystopias of Murakami Haruki and Banana Yoshimoto, Japanese literature has something for everyone. The classical tradition encompasses an enormous array of literary genres including the classical court tale (monogatari), the martial tale (gunki monogatari), *waka* and *haikai* poetry, linked verse, the *noh*, kabuki, and puppet theater, as well as popular illustrated fiction, poetry and fiction in Chinese, and poetic travel diaries. With the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the opening of Japan to the West in the late nineteenth century, the modern novel and short story came to the fore with writers like Natsume Soseki, Mori Ogai, Higuchi Ichiyo, and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, whose works captured not only the reality of daily life but also the dilemmas and contradictions of a nation swept up in the juggernaut of the modern global order. Two postwar Japanese novelists (Kawabata Yasunari and Oe Kenzaburo) have won the Nobel Prize for literature, and contemporary Japanese writers continue to produce fiction that draws from this rich tradition. Because of the enormous differences between Japanese and English, translations (when they exist) can only ever be a vague approximation of the original. So the best way to access this rich tradition is by studying Japanese. Japanese literature courses at BU are taught mostly in English translation but also include short passages in the original for those students who are up to the task. Around the third year of language study students will be able to begin reading in the original.