

TEACHING AND TESTING

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test

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Every year in August my Japanese students remember the Japanese Proficiency Test and pester me for the application forms. This year the Consulate has sent us 20 forms, and I will need to send away for another five, judging from the demand from our Year 11, 12 and 13 students.



Success in the test provides an internationally-recognised certificate endorsed for whichever level the student has achieved. It is more useful overseas than NCEA, because it is better known. Even in New Zealand, some scholarships offered by the Japan Foundation ask for a specific level of the proficiency test for candidates.

There are four levels, of which Level 1 is the highest. Although this level is hardly accessible to secondary students, the lowest two levels, Levels 4 and 3, can be done by our senior students. Most of my Year 12 pupils (OK, there are only nine this year!) are enrolling to do Level 4, and some keen Year 11 students want to have a go also. Five of my seven Year 13 students will try Level 3 (two did Level 4 last year from Year 12). One Year 13 student, having unwisely tried Level 2 at Year 12, is going to do it again. He will have to do some kanji study as Level 2 is well beyond the requirements for NCEA Level 3.

The format of the test is very unfriendly for Kiwi students, but with a little preparation, it can be made less daunting. The whole test is multi-choice, and divided into listening, reading and writing. Writing, however, is also multi-choice, and limited to selecting the correct written form. My students think that the listening is the hardest, although the kanji is also more than we do at school. The vocabulary and grammar for Level 4 is about the equivalent of halfway through Year 12. Level 3 of the proficiency test is a bit harder than Level 3 NCEA.

If you or your students are interested in the test, Google jplt and choose from a range of useful websites which offer sample tests, (with sound files), vocabulary and kanji lists, and other information. Students must be enrolled for the test by early September.

The tests are done on a Sunday in December, so your students will have time for kanji revision after their exams. Results come out in March, after school has been back for about a month. There are changes signalled which may help our secondary students – there is a possibility that another level may be introduced between Levels 2 and 3 – this would mean good students would be able to do Level 5 in Year 11, Level 4 in Year 12, and Level 3 in Year 13. It may also be offered twice a year instead of just in December.

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