



Japan Etiquette Guide

1. Punctuality

Events and meetings in Japan sometimes really do begin at 3 minutes past the hour. Being on time is essentially a given.

2. Greeting/Bowing:

To greet people the Japanese will bow, this can be from a small nod to a deep bended bow. Bowing serves a variety of functions generally speaking, you will bow when doing the following:

- Saying hello or goodbye to someone
- Starting or ending a class, meeting, or ceremony
- Thanking someone
- Apologizing to someone
- Congratulating someone
- Asking someone for a favor or their goodwill
- Worshipping someone or something

It can be confusing to foreign visitors how/which bow to do, the Japanese do not expect foreigners to know the proper bow rules, so a nod of the head is sufficient. Should you be interested in learning more about bowing and the rules behind this then see: <http://www.tofugu.com/japan/bowing-in-japan/>

3. Hierarchy & Respect

The characters for 'teacher' in Japanese literally read 'someone born before you'. Respect for those older and/or in more senior positions is a fundamental aspect of society which naturally reaches into business. Don't therefore be tempted to address most of what you say to the person who speaks the best English as they will frequently be further down the food chain. Allow your Japanese hosts to guide you as to where to sit.

See below regarding the giving and receiving of business cards.

4. Gifts (let them lead in giving gifts)

Always wrap gifts. The selection of the wrapping paper is critical. Do not give anything wrapped in white as it symbolizes death. Do not use bright colours or bows to wrap the gift. It is better to have the hotel or the store wrap the gift to ensure that it is appropriate.

Do not surprise the recipient with the gift. Give your host some warning during the evening that you intend to give them a present.

When you offer your gift, hold it in both hands and bow, saying words that let the person know, 'this gift is insignificant in comparison to the importance of the relationship'. Saying it's "a small thing", even if the gift is expensive, conveys this sentiment.

Give the gift with both hands and accept gifts with hands.

The Japanese will politely refuse a gift once or twice before accepting it. And it will not be opened in your presence. When a gift is offered to you, follow this same ceremony. Politely refuse once or twice, and then accept it with both hands, saving it to open later.



Generally, gifts will not be opened in your presence. If your host insist that you open the gift do so gingerly. They take pride in gift wrapping, show that you appreciation the effort.

Do not give gifts in odd number or the number four, as odd numbers are bad luck and four sounds like the word for death in Japanese.

Gifts should be given at the end of a visit.

5. Business attire

Japanese business etiquette may be getting less formal but business attire does not seem to be changing. Wear dark suits (navy or black) with white shirt and subdued tie from October - April and gray suit from May - September. Japanese summers are hot and humid and most Japanese men wear half-sleeve shirts during the summer months. Do not wear black suit, white shirt and black tie because that is funeral attire.

5. Japanese business cards:

In Japanese business etiquette, Japanese business cards are a 'must have'. Carry at least 100 for a 1 week business trip to Japan and expect to give out 3 - 4 Japanese business cards at a small meeting and as many as 10 - 12 at a larger meeting. Have double-sided Japanese business cards printed with the Japanese language side being custom designed using the same elements as the English side. If your original business card is not English (i.e. German, French, Spanish etc.) then use double-sided English and Japanese business cards when doing business in Japan.

Never flick, throw, slide, lob or otherwise push your Japanese business card across the table - always present your Japanese business card holding it with both hands, Japanese-language side facing forward (having your company logo at the top of the Japanese-language side will help you orientate it correctly!), to the most senior member of the Japanese party first, bowing slightly as you do so and then on down the corporate ladder.

Accept a Japanese business card with respect, using either hands, saying 'Thank you' or 'Hajimemashite' as you do so.

Never write notes on a Japanese business card - never! Carry a small note book to write down notes or enter them into your PDA.

Never fidget or play with a Japanese business card.

Keep your Japanese business cards in a proper carrying case and treat them with respect

Remember to deliberately and carefully pick up all of the Japanese business cards you receive and put them into your case at the end of the meeting. Forgetting his business card is a slap in the face to a salaryman even in 2004 - it says you did not consider him to be relevant. On this point - remember that many people here will be with their company for life, the most junior employee you meet with today may control a \$50m budget in 10 years' time - treat him with the same respect today that you would then. A young man who served me with green tea at Toyota in 1991 now controls a \$100m budget and still remembers that I treated him politely at that 1991 meeting.

You probably get the idea that Japanese business cards are important!

Take special care in handling cards that are given to you. Do not write on the card. Do not put the card in you pocket or wallet, as either of these actions will be viewed as defacing or disrespecting



the business card. Upon receipt of the card, it is important to make a photocopy of the name and title of the individual in your mind. Examine the card carefully as a show of respect.

6. Professionalism

In a meeting, if your slides don't advance without an unexpected noise (volume wasn't on when you practised), you've forgotten to bring the key literature or you can't remember the discount you're prepared to offer, then many Japanese will draw quick and potentially long-lasting negative inferences. do prepare thoroughly to ensure you take maximum advantage.

7. Personal habits:

Do not blow your nose in a public place (including meeting rooms).

Do not grab your host's hand when first meeting and give it a hearty shake - many Japanese seldom shake hands and can be so uncomfortable doing so as to avoid meeting again!

If you are greeted with a bow, return with a bow as low as the one you received. How low you bow determines the status of the relationship between you and the other individual. When you bow keep your eyes low and your palms flat next to your thighs. The business card should be given after the bow. This is very important to remember.