

御 お? go? (imperial honorific)



Pera Pera Penguin's

5-minute Japanese Class by Hitomi Hirayama

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One of my Japanese friends invited me home for dinner the other day, and I met his 6-year-old son. The boy showed me his drawings and said: "This is **o-hana** (a flower)," "This is **o-tomodachi** (a friend)," "This is **o-sakana** (a fish)" and "This is **o-uchi** (a house)." I noticed that he put "o" before every noun, but why was that? No one taught me to add "o" before nouns at Japanese school. All I know is to put "o" before "mizu" (water), but do I have to say "o" before every word?

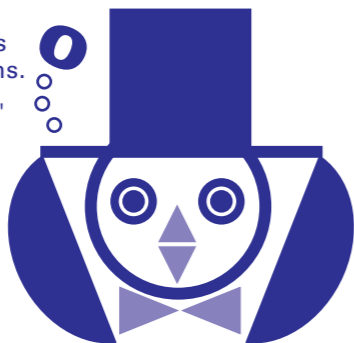
■■■ "Pole-san, o-shigoto wa o-isogashii desu ka? o-jikan arimashitara mata o-shokuji o shimashō ne!" (Mr. Pole, are you busy with work? Let's go for dinner again if you have time!) Well, Mr. Pole! Can you figure out how many "o"s I said? I said four! In daily conversations involving women or in business situations, the Japanese put "o" before nouns, adjectives and verbs. Sometimes, they say "go" instead of "o." Making such a distinction depends on which word you are using, and you may need to know which words take "o." Rules for the distinctions are complicated and there are quite a few exceptions. To make it even more complicated, the rules for distinguishing "go" from "o" vary according to the people, occupations and their environment. I tried to think of a way to make it easier for you to understand, but I couldn't figure out any easy rules. I hope that this will help you out, even though these explanations may apply only to about 70 percent of vocabulary. Let me omit the applications for verbs for this lesson. Generally, "o" and "go" are placed before nouns.

These are some examples that take "go" and "o." Please refer to this list to see which word takes "go" or "o." As for the words that are not on this list, please make your own decisions by listening to how Japanese people around you use them. "i" adjectives and "na" adjectives are mostly used by older women.

The kanji **御** (Imperial honorific) is pronounced either "go" or "o," and it turns nouns and adjectives into their polite forms.

There are four reasons for placing "go / o" before words:

- 1) For polite expressions
- 2) Beautifying the words
- 3) Softening the expressions (mostly preferred by women)
- 4) Speaking to children ("o" is commonly used)



● "o" is for the frequently used words related to everyday life.

お + noun, adjective ← Words with short syllables
Words that relate to daily life

e.g. fish 魚 **sakana** → お魚 **o-sakana** rice 米 **kome** → お米 **o-kome**

● "go" is used for words related to "action/activity" (Generally, "go" is placed before words with a Chinese pronunciation, but I think that it is very difficult for students to distinguish which words these are. That is why I have tried to explain "go" in this way.

御 **go** + noun ← abstract noun
The words are related to "actions/activity"

e.g. introduction 紹介 **shōkai** → 御紹介 **go-shōkai**
contract 契約 **kēyaku** → 御契約 **go-kēyaku**

お + noun	ご + noun	お + "i" adjective
name お名前 o-namae	business ご用件 go-yōken	busy お忙しい o-isogashi (frequently used in daily life)
letter お手紙 o-tegami	address ご住所 go-jūsho	expensive お高い o-takai (mostly used by elderly women)
holiday お休み o-yasumi	contact ご連絡 go-renraku	cheap お安い o-yasui
medicine お薬 o-kusuri	reservation ご予約 go-yoyaku	fast, quick お早い o-hayai
soy sauce お醤油 o-shōyu	departure..... ご出発 go-shuppatsu	young お若い o-wakai
chopsticks..... お箸 o-hashhi	family ご家族 go-kazoku	hot お暑い o-atsui
money お金 o-kane	anxiety ご心配 go-shinpai	cold (weather) o-samui
sake お酒 o-sake	order ご注文 go-chūmon	お + "na" adjective
telephone お電話 o-denwa	confirmation ご確認 go-kakunin	cheerful お元気な o-genkina (frequently used in daily life)
work..... お仕事 o-shigoto	explanation..... ご説明 go-setsumē	like お好きな o-sukina
cold お風邪 o-kaze	neighborhood..... ご近所 go-kinjo	be good at お上手な o-jōzuna
cooking..... お料理 o-ryōri	message..... ご伝言 go-dengon	dislike お嫌いな o-kiraina
		quiet お静かな o-shizukana



Conversation 会 話 kai wa

Put "o" or "go" if necessary.

- Do you like **sake**?
酒が好きですか。
sake ga sukidesu ka
Yes, I do.
はい 好きですね。
hai suki desu ne
- Thank you for calling. I suppose you are busy with work, aren't you?
電話 ありがとうございます。
denwa arigatō-gozaimashita
仕事 忙しいそうですね。
shigoto isogashi-sō desu ne
- How is everybody in your family?
家族の皆様 元気ですか。
kazoku no mina-sama genki desu ka
They are all fine, thanks for asking.
はい おかげさまで 元気です。
hai okagesamade genki desu
- Which Japanese food do you dislike?
日本の食べ物は 何が 嫌いですか。
Nihon no tabemono wa nani ga kirai desu ka
- May I take your order?
注文は
chūmon wa
- You'd like to make a reservation, right?
Please give us your name, address and phone number.
予約ですね。名前と住所と
yoyaku desu ne namae to jūsho to
電話番号 お願いします。
denwa-bangō onegaishimasu
- Do you have time right now?
今 時間 ありますか。
ima jikan arimasu ka

- Answers
- o-sake ga o-suki desu ka**
 - o-denwa arigatō gozaimashita o-shigoto o-isogashi-sō desu ne**
 - go-kazoku no mina-sama o-genki desu ka**
 - o-kirai desu ka**
 - go-chumon wa**
 - go-yoyaku desu ne o-namae to go-jusho to o-denwa bango onegaishimasu**
 - ima o-jikan arimasu ka**