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Compass Japanese 1 Interactive Workbook Compass Japanese 1, Supplemental Resource: Japanese Writing Practice Book for Novice Learners

By Team Compass [Yo Azama, Atsuko Kiuchi-Fagerness, Takae Tsujioka, Mio Nishimura, and Atsuko Noguchi]. Tokyo: Kurosio Publishers, 2025, 293 pp. + 48 pp. ¥3,500

Reviewed by Noriko Sugimori

Team Compass's *Compass Japanese 1 Interactive Workbook* (hereafter *Workbook 1*) is an exciting addition to the *Compass Japanese* series. While the word “workbook” in the title may suggest the need for a separate textbook, *Workbook 1* can be used as a primary textbook on its own. *Workbook 1* is supplemented by the *Compass Japanese 1, Supplemental Resource, Japanese Writing Practice Book for Novice Learners* (hereafter *Writing Practice Book*), a forty-eight page, full-color booklet focused on *hiragana* and *katakana*. Supplemental online materials are also available at <https://www.9640.jp/compass/>.

Before discussing *Workbook 1* and the supplemental materials, the following explanation will outline how *Workbook 1* is situated within the overall *Compass Japanese* series. According to the publisher's website, the *Compass Japanese* series is described as a content-based Japanese learning resource informed by the Global Competence framework and designed to nurture learners' skills in reflecting on, organizing, and communicating ideas about Japan, their home countries, and themselves through cultural and social themes. The release of the *Workbook* and *Resource Book* for four levels is planned. To date, *Compass Japanese Intermediate Interactive Workbook* and its *Resource Book*, which are the most advanced level and are suitable for Advanced Placement (AP) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) (both of



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which are typically taken in the junior and/or senior years of high school), have been published. The release of *Compass Japanese 1 Resource Book* as well as *Compass Japanese 2 and 3 Interactive Workbooks and Resource Books* is anticipated.

This review examines the components of *Workbook 1* in the following order: the main workbook, the supplemental *Writing Practice Book*, and the supplemental online materials. The structure of *Workbook 1* is both motivational and learner-centered. The foreword, “Welcome Aboard!,” invites learners on a journey into Japanese language study. A subsequent section, “My Intentions and Commitment for Learning Japanese,” encourages students to articulate a personal goal — such as “practicing writing 5 kanji a day”— and to share that goal with classmates, who sign as “accountability partners” to periodically check in on each other’s progress (3). With an emphasis on metacognition and the encouragement of collaborative and interactive learning, this approach is widely recognized as a productive method for language learning.

Before the start of each lesson, students are encouraged to reflect on essential questions and identify the goal from the “I Can List” that they are most interested in achieving. Each I Can List contains two or three items. For example, in Lesson 1 of Unit 4, the goals are “Describe family structures” and “Describe important people in my life.” *Workbook 1* consists of six units, each with two lessons. Each lesson features two learning cycles along with opportunities for reflection and feedback (See Figure 1).

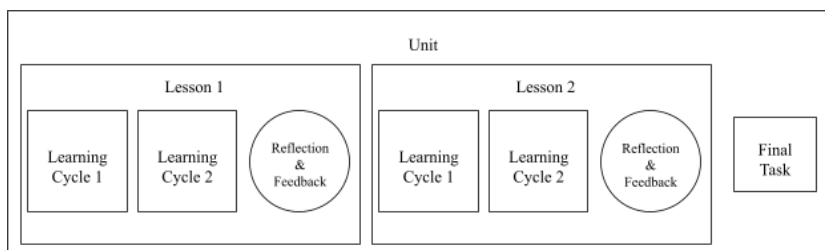


Figure1: Simplified Organization of Lessons in the *Compass Japanese 1 Interactive Workbook* (Adapted from Team Compass, 2025, 7)

To help students navigate the complexity of the lesson structure, the workbook provides a color-coded index at the top right corner of the odd-numbered pages, indicating the unit, lesson, and cycle currently being viewed. This design feature makes it easier for learners to keep track of

their location within the workbook.

According to the authors, the topics address “urgent and intriguing global themes, such as learner communities in modern times, evolving family structures, changing student lives, personal and collective identities” (7). The units are:

1. *Junbi OK!* (“Get Ready!”): What are the positive attributes of a good language learner?
2. *Tomodachi o tsukuroo!* (“Making Friends!”): How do our cultural identities shape ourselves?¹
3. *Gakkoo e yookoso!* (“Welcome to My School”): What is learning? What are the roles of school?
4. *Nani ga taisetsu?* (“What’s Important to Us?”): What do you value in your life?
5. *Doko ni sumitai?* (“Home and Lifestyle”): What is a home?
6. *Nani ni naritai?* (“Dream Comes True”): Who am I? Who do I want to become in the future?

The Compass series, including *Workbook 1*, is guided by the Global Competence framework’s four domains (numbering added): (1) investigating the world beyond one’s immediate environment, (2) recognizing one’s own and others’ perspectives, (3) communicating ideas with diverse audiences, and (4) translating ideas into action to improve conditions (Asia Society 2005, quoted in Team Compass 2025, 8). These goals are visibly integrated into the “Learning Journey Map” (7–12), which shows how each step in the learning cycle aligns with the framework. Except for Unit 1, each learning cycle follows the five-step process below and introduces a total of eight activities:

0. Let’s Explore!
 1. Investigate the World
 2. Recognize Diverse Perspectives
 3. Communicate Ideas
 4. Let’s Show What We Can Do!

The first step in the learning cycle is Step 0: Let’s Explore!, in which students check what they already know about the topic by answering questions and jotting down their observations from related photographs or illustrations. After this, structured activities begin. For example, in Step 1: Investigate the World, Activity 1: Take a Look into Japanese Culture,

students assess their views on the assigned topic using Likert-scale statements (e.g., “It is good to have a school uniform”), which allow them to track changing perspectives. This is followed by vocabulary work using flash cards and comprehension checks using online audio resources (Activity 2). The inclusion of detailed procedures for six types of sample flash card activities (9 – 10) is particularly useful.

Step 2: Recognize Diverse Perspectives includes Activity 3: Read and Learn, which consists of reading materials and comprehension activities such as categorization, true-or-false questions, checklists, and fill-in-the-blank exercises. In Activity 4, students practice asking questions that are drawn from previous readings. Step 3: Communicate Ideas focuses on key language structures. Activity 5: Let’s Explore Language Structure! consists of five small steps. In each learning cycle, usually two to three new language structures are introduced. First, Japanese sentences featuring the new language structures are shown, and students examine the example sentences and look for the target pattern. Then, the class discusses the possible meanings and patterns. This activity leads to the next step where students explore how the structure can be applied in various contexts. After these steps are completed for both structures, students proceed to the final step, where they are encouraged to apply the new patterns in novel situations. In Activity 6: Write It Out, students express their thoughts using a language template in the *Workbook 1*. In Activity 7: Pair/Group Share, they exchange ideas with classmates using the newly learned structures. Activity 8: Read Fluently is a paired activity in which students read aloud the text used earlier in Activity 3, Read and Learn from Step 2. Step 4: Let’s Show What We Can Do! emphasizes performance tasks such as creating videos or giving presentations. Each lesson ends with an expanded vocabulary list, a reflection, and an I Can List using a four-point scale (ranging from “Yes, with confidence” to “Not yet”). Students revisit the I Can List to evaluate their confidence and write a brief reflection.

Following these five steps in each lesson, the unit ends with the Final Task, which connects students to the world using Japanese in context-specific roles. Students choose from multiple modalities—e.g., video, poster, flyer, or slides—except in Unit 6, where a speech is required. This flexibility supports diverse learning styles. Each task includes a rubric with four criteria (content, language use, comprehensibility, impact) and three performance levels (Engaging 10, Competent Strong 9, Minimal 8; Emerging 7 or below), with space for comments.

Workbook 1 concludes with appendices (numbers, time, family, position words, counters, and colors), a vocabulary index, and a grammar list. The appendices are visually appealing and conducive to learning. A vocabulary index is presented in *gojūon* alphabetical order. In *Workbook 1*, the same vocabulary can appear in four formats: in the main text, in a vocabulary list arranged in the order of appearance in the post-text vocabulary list, in post-lesson thematic lists, and in the *gojūon* order in the vocabulary index. This progression—from contextualized use to increasingly decontextualized presentation—scaffolds learning by guiding learners from context-dependent recognition to more random recall, thereby making vocabulary acquisition more accessible. The grammar list also employs the unit-specific colored background, thereby facilitating students' navigation.

Overall, the *Workbook 1* is full of stimulating teaching ideas to make all the learning processes interactive. The range of various activities from easy to challenging helps students express and exchange their ideas in Japanese. Its beautifully colorful visuals are also helpful. One of the particular strengths of *Workbook 1* is its emphasis on diversity of representation and authenticity. Unlike many novice-level textbooks centered on a small cast of characters, *Workbook 1* features approximately fifty-five different individuals (excluding animal characters), many of whom are shown in photographs. Students in Japan appear in over sixteen types of school uniforms, in addition to casual attire. Additionally, the inclusion of people with disabilities and non-stereotypical gender roles—e.g., male childcare worker, female doctor—reflects intentional inclusivity.

Although *Workbook 1* has many strengths, some vocabulary issues warrant instructors' attention. While the sequencing and activity-based approach to vocabulary is effective, this reviewer has some questions about the choice of vocabulary items. For example, *shookooguchi* (shoe-changing entrance) appears early in Unit 1, while the more common *genkan* (entrance) is delayed until Unit 5. Given that *shookooguchi* is a low-frequency word, which has zero hits in the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ) compared to *genkan*'s 4,291 hits, instructors should ensure students do not overgeneralize the rarer term.² Other omissions of common expressions include *migi* (right) and *hidari* (left) in the position word section (282), and lack of independent entries for *jitensha* (bicycle) as well as *kuruma* and *jidōsha* (car), although they appear within compound terms, including *jitensha okiba* (bicycle parking) and *kuruma isu* (wheelchair). Likewise, in Unit 6, which

discusses future careers, *koomuin* (public employee) is present, but *kaishain* (office worker) is not.

The *Writing Practice Book* opens by introducing the four script types—*hiragana*, *katakana*, *kanji*, and *rōmaji*—and distinguishes them using color, underlines with three different types of lines, and labeling. The Japanese Sound System section introduces mora and pitch accents using examples like *konnichiwa* and *arigatoo*, with color-coded high/low pitch indicators (e.g., LHHHH) (3). Like *Workbook 1*, the *Writing Practice Book* promotes diversity. For example, a boy in a wheelchair appears in two photos, and a female executive is shown leading a meeting. All of which help to emphasize the importance of inclusivity across differences and discourage stereotypes.

The *Writing Practice Book* presents 129 example words in *hiragana* and *katakana*, each accompanied by a red bar placed *above* the high-pitch segment, along with English translations and supporting photos or illustrations. The red bars effectively draw attention to pronunciation patterns. However, surprisingly, this reviewer found discrepancies in the stated pitch patterns of the following three examples: *robotto* (robot), *surippa* (slippers), and *kyappu* (cap). While the *Writing Practice Book* presents *robotto* and *surippa* as HLLL, this reviewer perceives them as following the LHLL pattern. Likewise, although the *Writing Practice Book* marks *kyappu* (cap) as LHH, this reviewer's intuition suggests it follows the HLL pattern. It is worth noting that *kyappu* in this context refers to a hat, not a lid such as that of a ballpoint pen. A check of these words in the Online Japanese Accent Dictionary (OJAD), available at <https://www.gavo.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ojad/>, confirmed that both HLLL and LHLL patterns are accepted for *robotto* and *surippa*. However, *kyappu* was not listed. Drawing a line above the high-pitch portion of a word, as an attempt to raise awareness of pitch accent—an aspect often neglected in the past—has recently been observed in other textbooks as well. The problems that arise from this practice, therefore, should not be regarded as a weakness unique to *Workbook 1*, but rather as a structural limitation inherent in the presentation of pitch accent on the printed page, and one that instructors need to keep in mind.

Lastly, some words about the supplemental online materials are in order. The following five resources have been planned: Sensei's presentations, Audio Narration [of activities], Vocabulary list, Answers, and the Teacher's Guide. Furthermore, a teacher community on the publisher's website has also been established for sharing teaching ideas

and publication updates. At the time of writing, the Audio narration and Vocabulary list are complete; Sensei's presentations and Answers are partially available. Teacher's Guide is under construction. It is hoped that online materials will be further enriched, encouraging the active exchange of ideas among instructors.

In conclusion, *Compass Japanese 1 Interactive Workbook* and its accompanying *Writing Practice Book* represent an important contribution to Japanese language instruction at the novice level. The workbook effectively integrates the Global Competence framework by providing relevant learning cycles for students. Additionally, by emphasizing inclusivity and interactive learning, these resources foster authentic communication, promote student reflection, and cultivate intercultural awareness. While some vocabulary and pitch accent choices may require instructor mediation, these resources offer a valuable addition to secondary Japanese language classrooms. Although primarily designed for high school students, the *Workbook 1* provides profound insights into learner-centeredness and inclusivity, along with stimulating teaching ideas that make it an indispensable resource for Japanese language instructors across teaching contexts.

NOTES

- ¹ In this review, macrons are used for long vowels in Japanese terms, except in direct quotations where the original spelling has been preserved.
- ² National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (NINJAL). *Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ)*. Chunagon 2.7.3. <https://clrd.ninjal.ac.jp/bccwj/>. Accessed August 18, 2025.