The 80/20 JAPANESE Guide To
Japanese Verb Tenses & Forms

Verb Structure & Types

Stem		Ending
Three types: "ru-verbs", "u-verbs", irregular verbs.	+	Changes according to verb tense/form and politeness.
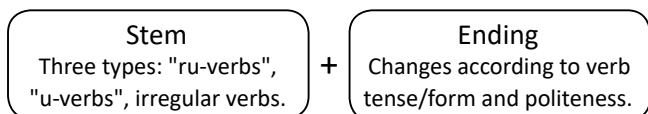
Ru-Verbs (called "add-on verbs" in 80/20 Japanese)

Stem is always the same. Dictionary form (informal present/future tense) is always "**stem** + ru", eg. eat = **tabe**ru.

U-verbs ("vowel-changing verbs")

Last sound in stem changes to fit verb ending.
This sound is taken from same line in syllabary (hiragana chart) for all tenses for a given verb. See examples below.
Notation: stem(X) = stem with X vowel sound variant.

Vowel (X)	Example tense/form with stem(X)	Examples		
		drink	**write**	**buy**
a	Negative informal = **stem(a)** + nai	**noma**nai	**kaka**nai	**kawa**nai*
i	Polite present/future = **stem(i)** + masu	**nomi**masu	**kaki**masu	**kai**masu
u	Dictionary = **stem(u)**	**nomu**	**kaku**	**kau**
e	Polite potential = **stem(e)** + masu	**nome**masu	**kake**masu	**kae**masu
o	Let's... = **stem(ō)**	**nomō**	**kakō**	**kaō**
- (none)	Informal past = **stem(-)** + [various]	**no**nda	**ka**ita	**ka**tta

*If last sound in stem is from a-line (a,i,u,e,o), stem(a) variant uses "wa".

Irregular verbs

Don't fit either of above types. Only three verbs in this category:
suru/shimasu (do), kuru/kimasu (come), iku/ikimasu (go).

Verb Tense/Form Selection and Usage

Japanese verbs are conjugated based on two things - function (tense/form) and politeness (polite or informal).

Choosing the appropriate level of politeness

Polite	Informal
• People older or more senior (eg. boss, even if a younger age) • Unfamiliar people • Clients, customers etc. **If in doubt, be polite!**	• Familiar people, such as family and close friends (incl. close older people) • People younger or more junior (eg. subordinates, lower-rank colleagues) • Children (often even if unfamiliar)

Choosing the appropriate verb tense/form

Tense/form	When to use it
Present/Future	Actions that start in the future; Recurring/habitual actions
Past	Actions that have completed (incl. recurring/habitual actions that have ceased)
Negative forms	Same as for equivalent postive form, but with negative meaning, ie. "will not __", "did not __", etc.
Let's...	To say, "Let's do...". Add "ka" for question: "Shall we...?".
Potential	To say someone can do/is capable of doing something.
I want to...	To say, "I want to...". Not used for, "I want [something]". Change "tai" to "takunai" to make negative (don't want).
Te-Form	Many uses, including (but not limited to): **~te + iru/imasu**: "Is doing". Actions currently in progress. **~te + ita/imashita**: "Was doing". Actions that were in progress at a specific time in the past (eg. At 2pm, I was ...) **~te + kudasai**: "Please ..." (eg. Please eat = tabete kudasai) **~te + [other verb/phrase]**: Action followed by another action. Can be stacked for multiple subsequent actions.

Polite Verb Tenses & Forms

	Present/future	Past	Negative present/future	Negative past	"Let's..." form	"I want to..."	Potential ("can do")
ru-verbs	stem + masu	stem + mashita	stem + masen	stem + masen deshita	stem + mashō	stem + tai desu	stem + raremasu
u-verbs	stem(i) + masu	stem(i) + mashita	stem(i) + masen	stem(i) + masen deshita	stem(i) + mashō	stem(i) + tai desu	stem(e) + masu
shimasu	shimasu	shimashita	shimasen	shimasen deshita	shimashō	shitai desu	dekimasu
kimasu	kimasu	kimashita	kimasen	kimasen deshita	kimashō	kitai desu	koraremasu
ikimasu	ikimasu	ikimashita	ikimasen	ikimasen deshita	ikimashō	ikitai desu	ikemasu

Informal Verb Tenses & Forms

Te-Form

Note: U-verb conjugations for past tense and て -form vary according to last sound. Grouped here by last sound in dict. form.

	Present/future	Past	Negative present/future	Negative past	"Let's..."	"I want to..."	Potential ("can do")	Te-Form
ru-verbs	stem + ru	stem + ta	stem + nai	stem + nakatta	stem + yō	stem + tai	stem + rareru	stem + te
u-verbs								
u, tsu, ru	stem(u)	stem(-) + tta	stem(a) + nai	stem(a) + nakatta	stem(ō)	stem(i) + tai	stem(e) + ru	stem(-) + tte
bu, mu, nu		stem(-) + nda						stem(-) + nde
ku		stem(-) + ita						stem(-) + ite
gu		stem(-) + ida						stem(-) + ide
su		stem(-) + shita						stem(-) + shite
shimasu	suru	shita	shinai	shinakatta	shiyō	shitai	dekiru	shite
kimasu	kuru	kita	konai	konakatta	koyō	kitai	korareru	kite
ikimasu	iku	itta	ikanai	ikanakatta	ikō	ikitai	ikeru	itte