



A typical day at school

What time should you get there? School actually starts at 8:50, but there is a morning meeting at 8:20 so try to be there by 8:10.

What happens in the morning? In the morning meeting, the day's schedule and the general happenings around school are discussed. Very little effort is going to be made to help you understand what is going on but your presence is still required.



Kids will come to the staffroom to ask for teachers. In order to enter the staffroom, students must ask for permission. Therefore, you will hear the same expression many times. Often times, they are asking permission to pick up the teacher's resources for the following class.

Going to lessons- If you're lucky, you will have a printed schedule of your classes for the week. If you are not provided with one, REQUEST ONE! Some teachers may forewarn you so that you can head off to class together; others will just expect to see you in class. In elementary school, it's common for the students to collect you from the staffroom, as this helps them practice English.

There are 6 classes a day, 50 minutes each. The schedule will change from time to time, so make sure you know what's going on for the week. Normally, 1st through 4th period are before lunch and 5th and 6th will be after cleaning time.

Sidenote!! Up until recently, elementary school children weren't exposed to very much English so you may be surprised. The approach to language education in Japan is a bit different than in the West. You aren't going to change it overnight. Class is mostly instructed in Japanese. You may find it difficult to follow what is going on or even know what you are supposed to do. Go with the flow. It's ok if the teacher says your name and you have no idea what they want you to do, just ask.

What happens in class?

Junior High (*chuugakko*) - Most ALTs will be expected to do the greeting. It usually consists of "Hello. How are you? What day is it today? What's the date today? How's the weather?" From here, the JTE will take over and you will assume a supportive role. This means that you will be used as a model for correct pronunciation, rhythm and intonation. You may also be involved in short role-plays with the JTE in order to present new grammar points. The JTE will occasionally call upon your expertise as a native English speaker. For example, extra vocabulary, idioms and the like. Some JTEs will ask you to prepare warm-up activities for the students. It's a good idea to find out class content ahead of time so you can put something together. You may also be asked to assist students who have difficulties with the course content.



Elementary (*shougakko*)- Unlike junior high school, the ALT is often expected to be T1, whereas in junior high, you're always T2. The way the class is constructed is generally the same. Here it is important to be prepared as you will be giving, basically, the whole class. Always bring a back-up plan and games in case your lesson bombs. It's important to remember that not all lessons will be successful. Try not to take it

personally! The 5th and 6th graders are the only ones who have a textbook. When planning for the younger students, the aim is to make the class as fun and dynamic as possible.

It will take you some time to figure out just what your role is. Be aware that you're not a teacher but that your main concern is sparking an interest in English language and foreign culture. The relationship between an ALT and their students is unique and special. Though you're in a position of authority, the kids will love playing around with you. It takes time for the kids to warm up to you, especially in junior high, so stick with it and once you get things figured out, it will only become easier.

Lunchtime (*kyushoku*) – Your lunch will be prepared in the staffroom. However, the students are responsible for serving their own lunch. Every day, this is quite the operation. Once everyone has been served, the class leader will ask everyone to be quiet to start the meal with an *itadakimasu*. Be mindful that you may only have 15 minutes to eat 800 calories. You are expected to eat everything, so if there is anything you really dislike, tell the school straight away. Servings are quite generous so if need be, don't be afraid to ask your students to take some of it off your hands. While you're eating, announcements will be made over the loudspeaker. These may include birthdays and students' achievements. Once the meal is over, everyone must sit down and be quiet to give thanks for the meal with a *gochisosama deshita*. Everyone, including the teachers, will brush their teeth and then proceed to clean up.



Every once in a while, school lunch will be cancelled and everyone will be expected to bring their own lunch. Teachers often order bento, BUT sometimes informing the ALT slips their mind. You may have to go hungry, but the staff are normally very sympathetic.

Lunch break (*hiruyasumi*) – A good time to get to know your students better.

Cleaning time (*souji*) – You might be surprised to witness your students transform into a custodial army. Some schools will expect you to help out, others will not, but do try to be enthusiastic, and remember that you are not permitted to talk. Groups of students will be responsible for specific areas and each group will be led by a teacher. Join in wherever you like! They'll be happy to have you take part.



Finishing up- The time you are allowed to leave varies from school to school. It is more the number of hours you work rather than the time you start and finish. However, you will want to talk to your predecessor and your BOE about what is expected of you here. Before you leave the staffroom, make sure to let everyone know you are leaving with a nice, loud *otsukaresama deshita*. This is a set expression to thank everyone for their hard work.

Sports club (*bukatsu*) – The teachers are also coaches for different sports clubs. Clubs meet all the way through the week and even on the weekends. Some of you may be interested in getting involved with some of the after school activities. You can ask your JTEs about how to join. However, please be conscious of your attendance. If you are not planning to go regularly, you want to make this clear from the beginning.



Your position in your town

There is a certain degree of pressure put on you as an ambassador for foreigners. Do try to be as accommodating as possible, say yes often. Be friendly to everyone. Random people may approach you in the post office and ask who you are.

Some people have mandatory English conversation classes (*eikaiwa*) required of them by the BOE, others have voluntary classes and others don't have any at all. Know what is expected of you and make an effort for your *eikaiwa*, don't just rock up unprepared.

Get involved!! Try to find out if there are any community activities going on. Showing an interest goes a long way and these situations can be very fun and cultural. It can be very rewarding to participate and the people of your town will appreciate the effort.

Take the time to meet new people and make friends. There should be a place that offers cultural activities of some sort, such as pottery classes at the culture center, etc. Work with the options you are given, even if it's not exactly what you wanted. It will help you to get out of the house and get to know more Japanese people. Come winter, it will make a big difference!

You will run into your students all the time. Sometimes they will be with their parents and they may want to meet you. Be polite but be yourself. Some will be excited to see you, others will try to act like they do not see you!

Try not to do anything to draw negative attention to yourself, in Japan word gets round, VERY FAST! Most of us live in rather small towns. You will find that virtual strangers know your business at times, so try not to give them anything too juicy.

Times to look out for

There are some specific times, both good and bad, to look out for.

Summer: As you have noticed, it's HOT!!! When you go to school, you will be sweating... like a pig. Everyone carries sweat towels, so feel free to bring yours as well. The classroom windows will be wide open, welcoming all bits of nature in. It's a little like working outside. Students are not allowed to fan themselves or drink anything during class so be mindful.

Winter in Japan can be quite long and very cold. Just like summer, the schools are open to the elements, no matter the temperature. The kids will be shivering in their seats but they are not allowed to cover their uniforms, in other words, no jackets. You yourself should layer up from underneath. You may be asked to wear a mask to school as this is also flu season. Don't be surprised if entire grades are sent home to prevent spreading the flu. There may or may not be space heaters in your school or staffroom but you can always get a cup of something hot. Mentally prepare yourself to buck up and go with the flow. It can be challenging.

In June and July comes rainy season (*tsuyu*). This is when it rains pretty much every day even if it looks nice in the morning. Sudden downpours are likely to happen while you're on your bike ride to school. Don't forget to throw some rain gear in your bag so you're not faced with the awkwardness of walking into the morning meeting dripping wet, with your attitude just as sodden.

What is that?

There are many creepy buggies in Japan, some of which are terrifying to look upon. Ones to be particularly mindful of are mukade, *suzumebachi*, *dani*, mosquitos, *hachi*). Cockroaches, geckos, huntsman spiders – not a great worry but you probably won't be making friends with them. You will have a creepy crawly incident at school eventually.