

Office and Enkai Etiquette

Forward

As you embark on this journey in the adventure that is your life, you'll be faced with new opportunities and challenges that you may never have even dreamed could be possible. While some encounters will be riveting, living and working in a foreign country can sometimes prove daunting and overwhelming. It doesn't just mean that you'll deal with a different language, but an entirely different culture that can be difficult to understand. In Japan especially, social interactions can be rather complex. There are expectations and unwritten rules that will be vastly different from your own. This means that you'll be faced with awkward – and sometimes frustrating – situations. The way that YOU REACT to those moments, however, will be key in making your stay more comfortable and fostering positive relationships with your coworkers. Just remember that – although it won't always seem *right* – **there is no universal “right” or “wrong” way; things are simply “different” here.** Your co-workers will understand that you're from a different culture, so don't worry overmuch about making mistakes. Just come to work with a positive, open-minded attitude towards the unexpected.

The following advice will cover tips for in- and out-of-office workplace interactions, and hopefully help you transition smoothly into your new schools!

Office Etiquette

No matter where you are, bad first impressions last. Try to hit the ground running with these tips!

-Be punctual. “On time” in Japan means *on time*. If the meeting starts at 8:00, it means 8:00 sharp. That said, try your hardest to get to school on time. Schools in Japan typically have office-wide morning meetings before classes. Find out what days your school has its meetings and at what time. To be safe, come to school 10 minutes early; it'll look better on you, and give you a little breathing room with which to adjust to sudden schedule changes.

-If you're running late...well, you're already running late, so don't panic. If you're only a few minutes behind and the morning meeting has already started, wait quietly until there's a lull in the announcements, then slip in as quietly and unobtrusively as possible. If, for some reason, you're going to be significantly late for any reason call your JTE “tantosha” at school. If you are a municipal JET and involved in something serious that has caused you to be late (hospitalization, traffic accident, random acts of God and/or the Universe), it would also be a good idea to call your supervisor at the Board of Education.

-Sign-in. As soon as you get to your school, go up to the sign-in and stamp your inkan (official name stamp necessary for documents in Japan). Your sign-in might be taken care of by your base school only, so remember to stamp for the days you're visiting other schools. Always carry your inkan with you, as you never know when you're going to need it!

-Check your schedule. Since you will be visiting several different classes within a school, check your schedule. Ideally, it's better to check the day before, but if you can't, then use that time before the morning meeting to track down your tantosha (or whoever makes your schedule) and double-check your assigned classes and lesson plans. Remember that teachers in Japan are very busy, and as such your tantoshas may be difficult to track down sometimes. Try to find a system of communication that works for you (weekly schedule on your desk by Friday afternoon, email, phone calls, etc.). Those ten minutes before the morning meeting might be good for this, too.

-Use "aisatsu." Aisatsu (greetings) are a very, *very* important part of Japanese culture. Not greeting/greeting someone poorly can be tantamount to a slap in the face. At schools, you'll see that there is a big stress on Aisatsu as an unwritten part of the classroom curriculum, and students get in trouble for not greeting teachers correctly. Using just a few basic Aisatsu properly will really show your coworkers that you're trying and you care.

***In the morning:** Approach the office door and say an upbeat, loud "ohayou-gozaimasu!" Respond in kind when people come into the office.

***When you meet people in the halls:** "Ohayo gozaimasu" (good morning) or "Konnichi wa" (good afternoon)

*** When you meet teachers throughout the day:** "o-tsukare-sama desu" (lit. "you're tired" kind of like saying "good job")

***When someone does something helpful for you:** "o-sewa ni narimashita" (thank you for your help)

***When you leave the office:** Face into the office as your walking out the door and say "O-saki ni shitsurei shimasu" (lit. I'm rudely going before you; excuse me for leaving).

-Hima desu neeeee~ As an ALT, you're almost guaranteed to have some free time. Sometimes, you'll have A LOT of free time. No matter how much, appearance is important in Japan, so try to look busy. If you already have your lessons all planned out, there are plenty of constructive ways to use your free time (making English boards, studying, etc.).

-Leaving school. In Japan, it's often seen badly if you leave at exactly your appointed time from work. This doesn't mean that you must stay until 6 or 8 (or 10pm like some teachers – *yikes!*) – and certainly no one will hold you captive there. However, staying at least 15 or 20 minutes afterwards will look better on you, and also give teachers the time to communicate with you if they need to. That said, if you have an

appointment or somewhere you must go, don't feel too bad about leaving at 4 pm. Calmly gather your things and approach the office door. In the doorway, face into to the office and offer a genki "o-saki ni shitsurei shimasu" with a slight bow (roughly translates as "excuse me for going before you" or "I'm rudely going before you").

What NOT to Wear: Kumamoto Edition

While the clothes don't necessarily make the man, sight *is* the first sense with which people tend to evaluate. First impressions are important, so use these dress code tips to make a dashing entrance and keep up your reputation as an upstanding, respectful, yet trendy foreigner.

<i>For the Sirs</i>	<i>For the Madames</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Slacks long-sleeve, button-up, collared shirts, Ties; long-sleeved shirts and sweaters for winter◆ at least one suit and one pair of dress shoes for special events◆ Sports pants and shirt for sporting events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Dresses, skirts, slacks, blouses; long-sleeved shirts and sweaters for winter◆ At least one suit (either skirt or pant is okay) and a pair of dress shoes for special events◆ Sports pants and shirt for sporting events

T.G.I. Cool Biz. Because it's really hot in Kyushuu, Kumamoto has a "Cool Biz" dress code that goes into effect in the summer months. This means that the following, more casual clothing is acceptable: short-sleeved, button-up collared shirts; short-sleeved polos; short-sleeved blouses.

Jewelry. Most schools restrict students from wearing make-up or jewelry to school. Some schools also restrict teachers. You may or may not be asked to adhere to those school rules. If you *are* asked, of course you should comply. If you feel strongly that it is a part of you that you simply cannot part with, then talk to one of your supervisors and explain its cultural significance. If you're not told to do anything, use discretion and do what makes you feel comfortable. Remember, you're not just an English teacher, but a cultural ambassador. What you wear can also be a chance for your students to learn about a foreign culture's attitude towards jewelry, make-up, and other such things that interest them at this age!

Unacceptable Attire. When in doubt: Not too short, not too low-cut. Clothing that exposes your shoulders or back at all are never worn to work. Ladies, please keep it classy – skirts at (or only slightly above) the knee, and no cleavage. If you have brought shirts that would be acceptable in your country, but you're not sure about here, invest in a ladies undershirt tank top that can be decoratively worn underneath (they're sold at Uniqlo, and can also be used to beat the heat!)

Extra Office 'Do's and 'Don't's

DO...

- Keep your phone on silent. If you need to make a call, step out of the staffroom/office. In some schools, it may be okay to answer/make the occasional in-office call.
- Join cleaning time. It'll help you talk to your students and feel more like you're part of the school.
- Try to participate in club activities. Find something that interests you and ask if you can join in occasionally. Your students will appreciate it, and it's fun to get to know them outside of class.
- Bring Omiyage to your schools after going for a vacation. It may be difficult to buy for all your schools, so buy omiyage for your main schools. However, if you go for a long vacation (i.e. back home), You should bring omiyage for all your schools. Base what you buy on the school's distribution system (One box on the back table vs. One piece on each teacher's desk).
- Have patience with seemingly strange comments. Co-workers may not follow the same cultural guidelines as you regarding what's appropriate to say to a person. Comments such as "You are very big" or "You have put on weight!" are not unusual. Recurring exclamations and questions like "Wow! You can use chopsticks!" and "Do you like rice?" are commonplace.

DON'T...

- ✧ **Important:** Don't do something stupid that breaks school rules or Japanese law. Examples include drinking and driving, smoking/smuggling marijuana, and driving without a license. If caught, you will lose your job and be deported.
- ✧ Don't put up with crude comments from your students. Sometimes you may be asked sexually related questions. Figure out a strategy to combat these. You can be firm or you can work out creative ways to brush off questions without answering. One possible answer is to say "shitsurei, omae", which lets the student know they have been rude.
- ✧ Don't complain about your work hours, salary, or job requirements to co-workers. Many teachers at your schools work longer hours, have more things required of them, and may get paid less. If you have a legitimate complaint, talk privately with your supervisor.
- ✧ Don't use computers at school for personal activities like games or shopping. Studying and working on school materials is fine but try to avoid non-work related activities.
- ✧ Don't get personally involved if you see a teacher physically punish a student; Remember, things are different here. If you see a teacher do something inappropriate then you should tell your supervisor.

- ✧ Don't forget about the various shoe rules (indoor, outdoor, toilet and gym). Also, as a general rule, most of the time you have to take off your shoes before entering the principal's office.
- ✧ Don't eat before "itadakimasu" is said. Also, don't stand your chopsticks in your rice as that is a ritual performed at funerals only. A good way to find out how to eat something new is to ask: "douyatte tabetara iideska?" which means "how do I eat this properly?"
- ✧ Don't talk loudly in the office. Your schools and offices have open work spaces and people will usually be working. It's fine to talk to your supervisor or other teachers but don't be too noisy.

PARTY in the JPN: Enkai Etiquette

The Japanese word "enkai" simply means "party." While your work place back home might have thrown the occasional Christmas and holiday party, enkai are a much bigger, perennial part of Japanese office life. One person is in charge of making the reservations for the venue. The invitation will usually come to you by way of a printed half-sheet on your desk. If you're unsure, ask your tantosha to double check if there's an enkai. As in all cultures (and particularly in Japan), several social rules apply. Read up, so that you'll know what to expect!

Types of enkai:

Whole-school: From the jimushitsu to the janitor (well, if the schools *had* one), everyone's invited!

Nen-bu: A grade holds its own enkai. You may (or may not D:) be invited to one of these.

***Note: Schools are not the only ones to hold enkai. If you join a group or troupe of sorts (Eikaiwa, pottery, dance class, martial arts, etc.), expect at least two or three enkai coming your way this year.

When will my schools host enkai?

- ✧ Years end (bounen-kai)
- ✧ new years (shinnen-kai)
- ✧ new school year begins (hishowakare-kai/hansei-kai)
- ✧ school year ends and some teachers move schools (soubetsu-kai)
- ✧ sports festival (otsukare-kai)/Chorus contest/Demonstration class/Big events (otsukare-kai)

Cost

Anywhere from ¥2,000 - ¥6,000

Cons --> Pro

Con	Pro
<p>✧ Overwhelming. Enkai, especially the first few, can be overwhelming. You've been in a work environment where everyone is busy, and suddenly you're expected to walk around and socialize -- <i>in Japanese</i>. Even if you speak a lot of Japanese, this can be awkward at first.</p> <p>✧ Expensive. Enkai can be expensive, especially around Christmas and new year's. It might get particularly expensive for <i>you</i>, since you'll have more than one school often inviting you at the same time in the year.</p> <p>✧ "I don't drink." Enkai are alcohol-heavy, and you're just not into that.</p> <p>✧ Hangovers: Japan has a a drinking culture where you can't let a glass go empty, so you'll get lots of refills before you really need them. Before you know it, you've lost count...and the next day all you want is a horse tranquilizer.</p>	<p>✧ Get to know your teachers! Going to enkai can really help your work relations. You know that math teacher that barely looked your way or answers your polite attempts at conversation? BAM! After your first or second enkai, she's chatting you up by the coffee pot. Remember that Japanese people are typically more reserved and shy than your culture probably is, so enkai - when people are drinking and NOT thinking overly much about work - is a great time to lodge your foot in the door.</p> <p>✧ Being an ALT gives you flexibility. Your schools obviously know that you teach at more than one school. If you get invited to too many and you feel overwhelmed, make a polite excuse, but ask them to tell you about the next one. As long as you express interest in joining the enkai (thus being part of the school), no harm no foul.</p> <p>✧ It's okay to say "no!". There are people who can't drink for several reasons, so it's not too strange/unacceptable to drink tea or soda.</p> <p>✧ Drink at your pace: It's rude to refuse a refill, but you can easily prevent hangovers by simply drinking at your own pace. Just don't let your glass go more than 1/2 empty and you'll be okay!</p>

Order of Operations

1. **Pay the man.** Arrive and pay before you sit down, in exact change if you can. A teacher will be collecting the money.
2. **Luck of the draw.** Some schools will have a little basket with folded, numbered papers in it to randomize seating. Pick one and find your seat (if you don't like the person next to you, don't worry; you can start moving after kampai!)
DON'T DRINK YET.
3. **Opening speech.** Someone will say something about something, which you may or may not understand. Wait patiently and quietly. DON'T DRINK YET.
4. **Kanpai!** Everyone says "Kanpai" or "cheers" after the speech. Now you can drink!
5. **Mingle.** Eat a bit at your table and talk to some teachers. Usually after the first 10 minutes or so, everyone will get up to mingle and converse with everyone else. Grab a bottle and circulate around the room, filling empty glasses and joining conversations!
6. **Closing speech...and maybe the school song.**
7. **Ni-ji-kai.** Literally the "second party." People break up into smaller groups and go other places to drink and eat more. You don't have to go, but it's a nice way to get to know your teachers even better. Popular nijikai is Karaoke and izakaya.

Enkai 'Do's and 'Don't's

DO...

- ✧ **Check the dress code:** Sometimes your schools will have a casual enkai (i.e. after sports day), but check just in case. When in doubt, dress up rather than down!
- ✧ **Arrive on time!** Just like school, Enkai are punctual. Try to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early if you're parking and walking.
- ✧ **Mingle!** Those teachers are just as shy of you as you are of them.
- ✧ **Offer refills!** Grab a bottle of whatever's being served, and pour some for your neighbors. Anything that's not completely full is fair game.
- ✧ **Don't double dip!** Use the back end of your chopsticks to serve yourself from the center platters.

DON'T

- ✧ **Don't arrive late.**
- ✧ **Don't drink before Kanpai.**
- ✧ **Don't serve yourself alcohol.** In Japan, if you serve yourself you can seem like a lush. Wait at least a while before you do.
- ✧ **Don't cancel.** Don't cancel your spot at an enkai without a very good reason (you're having surgery, violently ill, etc.). It takes a lot of planning to set up a nomikai, and you can lose a lot of face by canceling last minute.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is any "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature."

Living in a foreign country, it can be difficult to know if you are correctly interpreting people's intentions from their words and body language. Just because Japan is a "safer" country with a "polite" culture does not mean that it's exempt from cases of sexual harassment. Whether it's due to a cultural difference, you have the right to feel comfortable or at the very least safe in your work environment. While this will most likely *not* happen to you, it's important to be prepared in the off chance it *does*.

What do I do?

Address it. First, talk to the person who spoke/did something that made you uncomfortable. Express that it made you uncomfortable, and ask that they not make such comments again. Even if it's a joke that a fellow teacher may not have intended to offend or sexually harass you, if it makes you uncomfortable you should address it. Usually an apology will ensue, if it was unintentional. Show that there are no hard feelings, and proceed to interact as normally as you can around them.

Inform your supervisors. No matter how trivial you think it might be, you must tell *someone else* in case the harassment continues. Depending on how comfortable you feel, talk first with your tantousha at school and discuss the implications of what was said or done. It would not be a bad idea to tell the BoE supervisor who you have frequent contact with. Then, if things get serious, you can approach your Kyoto-sensei (vice-principal) if you feel there is a need. By telling others, you are safeguarding yourself, and making sure you have support should it come to such a situation where you need legal intervention. **If you feel like any of these is too intimidating at first, you can also talk to your fellow ALTs as well as the PAs.**

Points to know that might help:

- ✧ **Physical contact.** In Japan, outward expressions of affection are unusual. Hugging and kissing (even on the cheek) between men and women is particularly rare. If anyone is engaging you in unnecessary physical contact, consider this!

- ✧ **Reign in your instincts.** If you come from a place where hugging and kissing is the normal greeting, try to remember that you're in a different country. That aspect of your culture might make people around you uncomfortable at best, and at worst someone may take it the wrong way. Feel free to explain your customs, but be careful not to accidentally push them on other people!
- ✧ **Everyone makes mistakes.** You will make mistakes in Japanese. Your co-workers will also make mistakes in trying to communicate with you. While you might say something strange on accident, most of your coworkers will politely ignore it without mention. Before you jump to any conclusions about what someone else says, try to clarify their meaning.
- ✧ **Office vs. Enkai.** People will undoubtedly act differently when they're partying than they would at work. This goes double when alcohol is involved. Regardless, inebriation does not excuse sexual comments/actions that make you uncomfortable. Feel free to address those occasions, too.
- ✧ **The most important point: It's okay to say "no"!** You shouldn't ever feel the need to do something that makes you severely uncomfortable, so please remember that it's perfectly acceptable to say "no."