

Office Etiquette and Enkai

The Greetings:

☆ **Ohayou gozaimasu** → "Good morning" - anyone before 11am

☆ **Otsukaresama desu** → "You are working hard" - greeting for teachers and colleagues during work hours.
→ "otsukaresama deshita" is an extremely versatile phrase that you can use with anyone who is working, as a greeting, as a way of saying thank you for their help, and to excuse yourself. Have a listen out for how your colleagues and adult students use it and try yourself!

☆ **Konnichi wa** → Use for students / parents / strangers / anyone who is not a colleague or fellow teacher

☆ **Shitsurei shimasu** → "Excuse me" when entering someone else's office, or when getting someone's attention.
Shitsurei shimashita → when leaving the room.

☆ **Osaki ni shitsureishimasu + otsukaresama deshita** → "Excuse me for leaving first" and "you have worked hard" - say when leaving the office (the first expression is not always necessary, but can be extra polite). "Otsukaresama deshita" should be the last words you say to your colleagues before you leave for the day.

☆ **Yoroshiku onegaishimasu** → "Nice to meet you". Though you might think of this as only a phrase for self-introductions, "yoroshiku" conveys both "I'm relying on you" and "please rely on me" – you could translate it as "I'm looking forward to working with you." For example, you can use it with your new students, when you're joining a club, when someone asks a favour of you, when you ask a favour of someone else, or when your JTE asks you to do something specific in the next class.

☆ **Douzo/Doumo/Itadakimasu** → "Here you go" "Thank you for giving me this". Offering and receiving things. "Itadakimasu" is particularly used to accept food and drink. If you are offered food, take it with two hands and offer an "itadakimasu" in return.

The Right Moves:

Bow

The standard greeting. From a nod of the head to a 45 degree bow. A handy way to greet, thank, excuse, apologise or generally just be nice...

Two Hands

Take documents and other things offered to you with both hands. Shake hands with two hands. At enkai, pour your neighbour's drink with both hands.

Stand Up

Bowing and talking while standing is a little more polite than doing it from your chair, particularly with the principle/vice principle.

Walk Over There

Rather than talking to your colleague over your desks, walk around to them and talk from your feet. If the conversation is a long one, crouch down so they don't have to crane their neck up at you.



Dress Code Tips

Women:

Shoulders and chest covered, skirt or trousers below the knee, muted colours are best. You don't necessarily have to match your teachers' formality, but keep it professional, even during Cool Biz season. Painted nails/jewelry are avoided for convenience's sake.

Men:

Muted colours, shirt and trousers, short sleeves in Cool Biz season. Some senior high schools may require a tie and jacket in winter. Shorts, graphic T-shirts and jeans are usually too casual.

In General:

Bring slippers to each school (many Japanese wear Crocs/sandals always with socks). Cover all tattoos and wear simple studs. Keep hair natural-looking if dyed. Having a suit jacket on hand is useful for formal events.

Useful Vocab

Staff Room...職員室...shokuin shitsu
Nurse's Office...保健室...hoken shitsu
Classroom...教室...kyou shitsu
Principal's Office...校長室...kouchou shitsu
Gymnasium...体育館...taiikukan
BOE...教育委員会...kyouiku iinkai
Town Hall...役場...yakuba
City Hall...市役所...shiyakusho
Supervisor...担当者...tantousha
Graduation...卒業式...sotsugyou shiki
Entrance Ceremony...入学式...nyuugaku shiki
Start of Term Ceremony...始業式...shigyou shiki
End of Term Ceremony...終業式...shuugyou shiki
Morning Meeting...朝会...choukai
Lunch...休職...kyuushoku
Office Party...宴会...enkai

Events, Enkai and Everything Else

Be Punctual:

Rolling your eyes at how obvious this is? Groaning in pain at how hard it sounds? The time written for enkai and events is the starting time – not the arrival time. “Punctual” to most Japanese people means arriving a minimum of 5 minutes before the start (considered *giri giri* or “just made it!”)

- ☆ Best practice is to **arrive 15 minutes** before the start. For enkai, this means time to find your seat, order your drink and breathe before someone gives a speech and calls for a *kanpai*. You don’t want to be the JET keeping everyone sat in awkward silence with their drinks in front of them, and the principle waiting to give his/her speech.
- ☆ If you’re going to be late for any reason, tell someone (your JTE, the organiser etc.) Remember that “late” means arriving less than 5 minutes before the start!
- ☆ Cancel only if you must. Make sure you have the time/motivation to go before you say yes. But never decide not to show up without informing the organizer/your JTE. If something comes up and your plans change, it’s better to be rude and cancel than to say nothing at all. Your well-meaning Japanese coworkers/students will assume that you must be on death’s door if you skip without a word to them!



Participating in enkai is recommended and often helps improve relationships with colleagues. But be aware that they can be expensive (minimum ¥3000) so try to strike a good balance.

A few more points on enkai:

- Most of your colleagues will arrive straight from work, in their work clothes. So you will feel more at home in smart-casual clothes – but if you aren’t sure of the dress code, ask!
- Don’t overdrink – no one wants to pick you up off the floor! With your colleagues topping up your glass it can be hard to keep track.
- Try pouring your neighbour’s drink for them with two hands to get into the enkai spirit!
- Take food from shared platters with the back of your chopsticks (the side that hasn’t been in your mouth) whenever possible
- Rest your chopsticks on the rest or over your bowl, not in your food
- Try not to point/gesture with your chopsticks – put them down when you’re not using them
- Know how you’re getting home – get the number of a taxi/daiko company before you start drinking
- Never drive after drinking any amount of alcohol

Omiyage

If you go on a trip, you will be expected to bring back omiyage (souvenirs, almost always food) for your colleagues. You will find yourself on the receiving end of plenty of omiyage yourself from fellow teachers, but if you’re only going on a small trip and you don’t have the funds to buy any then it’s best not to mention that you are going at all!

Finally, Just Keep Your Eyes Peeled!

You will have plenty of times when you forget these rules / don’t know another one that your colleagues follow so naturally that they also don’t think to warn you about it... that’s perfectly fine! The most important thing is to ask when you are unsure – it’ll save you a few headaches in the long run! Try not to get discouraged when you have awkward or “failed” interactions at work. These are perfectly natural and something we all face regardless of Japanese level!

Have fun out there and stay sane!

Also feel free to ask me any questions, I know this is a lot to process!