

Answer to Question # 13: Answers 2, 3 & 4 are correct.

Answer: In Japanese, there are at least FOUR WAYS TO EXPRESS THE IDEA OF “WHEN” OR “IF.” They are illustrated by the four suggested answers to this question.

1. You may use the conjunction と (TO) to mean “when or if.” For example, 時間があると (jikan ga aru to...) = “when or if there is time...” However, you MAY NOT USE と (TO) prior to a REQUEST, COMMAND or SUGGESTION.

Therefore, ANSWER # 1 IS INCORRECT. On the other hand, you could say 時間があると公園に行きます (jikan ga aru to, kouen ni ikimasu) = “when or if I have time, I go to the park.”

2. You may use the たら (TARA) form to mean “when or if.” For example, 時間があったら (jikan ga attara...) = “when or if there is time...” You may use this form with requests, commands and suggestions. Therefore, ANSWER # 2 IS CORRECT, whether you mean to say “WHEN you have time” or “IF you have time.”

3. You may use the ば (ba) form to mean “if” (but not “when”). For example, 時間があれば (jikan ga areba) = “if there is time...” You may use this form with requests, commands and suggestions IF you use a NON-ACTIVE VERB like aru (arimasu). Therefore, ANSWER # 3 IS ALSO CORRECT, if you mean to say “IF you have time,” but NOT if you mean to say “WHEN you have time.”

[However, you may NOT combine an ACTIVE VERB like 来る (kuru) with ば (ba) when making requests, commands and suggestions. For example, you may NOT say 東京に来れば家に来てください (toukyou ni kureba uchi ni kite kudasai) = “if you come to Tokyo, please come to my home.” Instead say 東京に来たら家に来てください (toukyou ni kitara uchi ni kite kudasai) = “if you come to Tokyo, please come to my home.”]

4. You may use 時 (toki), which means “when” (but not “if”). For example, 時間がある時 (jikan ga aru toki) = “the time when there is time...” However, 時 (toki) is NOT used to mean a conditional “if.”

Therefore, ANSWER # 4 IS ALSO CORRECT, if you mean to say “WHEN you have time,” but NOT if you mean to say “IF you have time.”

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Question # 13: “When or If”

You want to say, “When or if there is time, please come to my home.”

Which of the following 4 Japanese sentences is correct?

1. 時間があると家に来てください (jikan ga aru to uchi ni kite kudasai).

2. 時間があったら家に来てください (jikan ga attara uchi ni kite kudasai).
3. 時間があれば家に来てください (jikan ga areba uchi ni kite kudasai).
4. 時間がある時家に来てください (jikan ga aru toki uchi ni kite kudasai).

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The following exchange occurred on Facebook after the above answer was posted.

Question: 「場合」と言うこともできますから、説明してくれませんか (baai to iu koto mo dekimasu kara, setsumei shite kuremasen ka) = “since to say “baai” is also possible, can you not explain and give?”

Answer: I believe you’re asking whether 場合 (baai) = “case” can also be used to mean “when” or “if.” For example, is it possible to say something like, “in case there is time, please come to my home”? Good question.

My wife isn’t sure about this and wants to consult with one of her friends. I’ll get back to you with an answer as soon as she lets me know.

Question: oh wow thanks for the quick answer! I think you explain these things very well and there are sometimes questions coming up in my mind that no normal book can answer. Then I mostly ask a Japanese friend. So it seems you have Japanese wife?! Seems you live my dream

and yes baai is more the like "in the case of" but the books sometimes can hardly distinguish between these things sometimes.

Answer: My wife and her Japanese friend agree that BOTH of the following sentences using 場合 (baai) are correct: 時間がある場合家に来てください (jikan ga aru baai uchi ni kite kudasai) = “the case when time exists please come to my home.” 時間がある場合は家に来てください (jikan ga aru baai wa uchi ni kite kudasai) = “as for the case when time exists, please come to my home.”

In other words, you’ve identified a FIFTH method for saying “when” or “if” – by using 場合 (BAAI). This is in addition to the と (to), たら (tara), ば (ba) and 時 (toki) methods already described in Answer 5. Thank you!

Question: Thanks for asking native speakers for first hand information in this case! If I may add the following.

My book says ~baai is an expression, with that you ASSUME a situation. The following part of the sentence then expresses, which countermeasure you choose or the resulting consequence (free translation, sorry for my English). Here is an example:

火事や地震の場合は、エレベーターを使わないでください (kaji ya jishin no baai wa, erebeetaa wo tsukawanai de kudasai) = "In case of fire or earthquake please don't use the elevator!"

But unlike the others (~eba only for if, ~toki only for when and ~to, an automatically resulting consequence) it is hard to say when to use it since it could also easily be substituted by ~tara, couldn't it?

Thanks for your really detailed answers and that you even asked your wife and friends for that. Keep going on like that! 頑張ってください! (ganbatte kudasai)