

Answer to Question # 14: Answers 1, 2, & 3 are correct.

Answer: As you probably know, 始めて (hajimete) is the te form of 始める (hajimeru), a transitive verb meaning “to begin something.” You use it in sentences like 日本語の勉強を始めています (nihongo no benkyou wo hajimete imasu) = “I am beginning Japanese study.”

However, 始めて (HAJIMETE) = “beginning” and 初めて (HAJIMETE) = “for the first time” are TWO DIFFERENT WORDS. Notice that DIFFERENT KANJI are used to write these two words.

初めて (HAJIMETE) = “for the first time” is an ADVERB that can be combined with the verbs です (desu) or だ (da). For example, 初めてです (hajimete desu) = “it’s the first time.”

Therefore, ANSWER # 1 IS CORRECT.

To expand on this, if you FOLLOW A NOUN WITH 初めてです (HAJIMETE DESU), you’re saying that someone is experiencing the noun for the first time. For example, 日本のお祭りは初めてです (nihon no omatsuri wa hajimete desu) = “as for Japanese festivals, it’s the first time.” This sentence means, “I’m experiencing a Japanese festival for the first time.”

You may ALSO COMBINE 初めて (HAJIMETE) WITH VERBS to express the idea of “doing something for the first time.” For example, 日本のお祭りには初めて来ました (nihon no omatsuri ni wa hajimete kimashita) = “as for to Japanese festivals, I came for the first time.” Here’s another example, お酒を初めて飲みました (osake wo hajimete nomimashita) = “he drank sake for the first time.”

これ (KORE) means “this,” and 今度 (KONDO) means “this time.” Both of these terms MAY BE USED WITH 初めてです (HAJIMETE DESU) = “it’s the first time.”

Therefore, ANSWERS # 2 and # 3 ARE ALSO CORRECT.

However, 初めて (HAJIMETE) and この時 (KONO TOKI) = “this time” SHOULD NOT BE USED TOGETHER. The sentence この時が初めてです (kono toki ga hajimete desu) SOUNDS AWKWARD to a Japanese native speaker.

Therefore, ANSWER # 4 IS INCORRECT.

In addition, 初めて (HAJIMETE) and 今 (IMA) = “now” SHOULD NOT BE USED TOGETHER. The sentence 今が初めてです (ima ga hajimete desu) sounds awkward and should not be used.

On the other hand, 今日 (KYOU) = “today” WORKS FINE WITH 初めて (HAJIMETE). So the following sentence is CORRECT: 今日が初めてです (kyou ga hajimete desu) = “today is the first time.”

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Question # 14: “Hajimete”

You encounter a Japanese festival while walking through town. Your friend asks you, 日本のお祭りを見たことがありますか (nihon no omatsuri wo mita koto ga arimasu ka) = “have you ever seen a Japanese festival?”

You say, いいえ、ありません (iie, arimasen) = “no, I haven’t.”

Next you want to say, “this is my first time.” (to see a Japanese festival)

Which of the following 4 Japanese sentences is correct?

1. 初めてです (hajimete desu).
2. これが初めてです (kore ga hajimete desu).
3. 今度が初めてです (kondo ga hajimete desu).
4. この時が初めてです (kono toki ga hajimete desu).