

ANSWER to question # 23: Answers 2, 3 & 5 are correct.

The character 後 can be read as あと (ATO) = “later,” “rear,” “remainder,” “another” (with numbers), “after,” or “behind.” 後 can also be read as ご (GO) = “later,” “after,” or “since.” 後 can also be read as のち (NOCHI) = “later” or “future.” Finally, when combined with ろ, 後 can be read as 後ろ (USHIRO) = “back” or “rear.”

In this discussion, we will use the あと (ATO) and ご (GO) readings of 後. We will translate both of these terms as “LATER.”

In order to answer Question 23, we want to express the idea “in 2 weeks” or “2 weeks elapsing.” In Japanese, when referring to time, the meaning “IN” or “elapsing” is expressed by the particle で (DE). By contrast, the meaning “AT” or “on” is expressed by the particle に (NI), when referring to time.

The 1st answer, 後二週間に帰ります (ato nishuukan ni kaerimasu), can be translated “later, at 2 weeks, I will return.” This doesn’t make sense because you can’t logically say “at 2 weeks.” “At” must refer to a specific time, not to an extended period of time. Therefore, ANSWER # 1 is INCORRECT.

The 2nd answer, 後二週間で帰ります (ato nishuukan de kaerimasu), can be translated “later, in 2 weeks, I will return.” This makes sense. Therefore, ANSWER # 2 is CORRECT.

The 3rd answer, 二週間後に帰ります (nishuukan ato ni kaerimasu), can be translated “at 2 weeks later, I will return.” This makes sense, if we think of “2 weeks later” as a specific time. Therefore, ANSWER # 3 is also CORRECT.

The 4th answer, 二週間後で帰ります (nishuukan ato de kaerimasu), can be translated “in 2 weeks later, I will return.” This doesn’t make sense because you can’t logically say “in 2 weeks later”; instead you must say simply “in 2 weeks.” Therefore, ANSWER # 4 is INCORRECT.

The 5th answer, 二週間後に帰ります (nishuukan go ni kaerimasu), is similar to the 3rd answer. It can be translated “at 2 weeks later, I will return.” Therefore, ANSWER # 5 is also CORRECT.

The 6th answer, 二週間後で帰ります (nishuukan go de kaerimasu), is similar to the 4th answer. It can be translated “in 2 weeks later, I will return.” Therefore, ANSWER # 6 is INCORRECT.

At this point, you are probably asking, “What is the difference between the 3rd and 5th answers? And what is the difference between the 4th and 6th answers? They look identical, so how do Japanese people know how to pronounce them?”

The answer is that Japanese people will always pronounce 後 as あと (ato) when it is the first word in a sentence, as in the 2nd answer. They will usually pronounce 後 as ご (go) when it is preceded by another term, as in the 5th answer, but, generally speaking, both pronunciations are considered correct in this situation. However, in cases where 後 is combined with another word to form a compound word, like 食後 (shokugo) = “after meals,” only the ご (go) pronunciation is acceptable.

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Question 23. “Ato and Go”

You want to say, “I will return in 2 weeks.”

Which of the following 6 Japanese sentences is correct?

1. 後二週間に帰ります (ato nishuukan ni kaerimasu).
2. 後二週間で帰ります (ato nishuukan de kaerimasu).
3. 二週間後に帰ります (nishuukan ato ni kaerimasu).
4. 二週間後で帰ります (nishuukan ato de kaerimasu).
5. 二週間後に帰ります (nishuukan go ni kaerimasu).
6. 二週間後で帰ります (nishuukan go de kaerimasu).