

Answer to Question # 5: Answer 1 is correct.

Answer: In Japanese, you will often encounter TRANSITIVE-INTRANSITIVE verb pairs that resemble each other but have different endings.

As you probably know, a TRANSITIVE verb is active, and it acts on a direct OBJECT. For example, 閉める (shimeru) = “close” is transitive. In the sentence, 窓を閉める (mado o shimeru) = “I will close the window,” 窓 (mado) = “window” is the direct object of 閉める (shimeru) = “close.”

By contrast, an INTRANSITIVE verb cannot act on a direct object. For example, 閉まる (shimaru) = “close” is intransitive. In the sentence 窓が閉まる (mado ga shimaru) = “the window will close,” the implication is that the window will somehow close by itself, and a direct object doesn’t exist.

In Japanese, the question often comes up: should I use aru (arimasu) or iru (imasu) after the te or de form of a verb? Here are THREE RULES you should know:

RULE 1. The te or de form of an INTRANSITIVE verb like 閉まる (shimaru) = “close” is ALWAYS followed by IRU (imasu), whether you are describing a fixed condition (like “closed”) OR an ongoing action (like “closing”). Therefore 窓が閉まっています (mado ga shimatte imasu) is grammatically correct, regardless of whether you mean “the window is closed” OR “the window is closing.”

Answer # 3 means “the window is closed,” and it’s fine grammatically, if you mean that the window is closed for no apparent reason. However, ANSWER # 3 is NOT THE BEST ANSWER here because it uses the intransitive verb 閉まる (shimaru). Since you are trying to imply that SOMEONE CLOSED the window, you should use the transitive verb 閉める (shimeru).

Answer # 4 is incorrect, in part because it also uses the intransitive verb 閉まる (shimaru). More importantly, ANSWER # 4 is INCORRECT because you may never use aru (arimasu) after the te or de form of an intransitive verb.

RULE 2. The te or de form of a TRANSITIVE verb like 閉める (shimeru) is followed by IRU (imasu) when describing an ONGOING ACTION. For example, 窓を閉めています (mado o shimete imasu) = “I’m closing the window.”

RULE 3. The TRANSITIVE ARU RULE: the te or de form of a TRANSITIVE verb like 閉める (shimeru) is usually (but not always – see the next paragraph) followed by ARU (or arimasu), when describing a FIXED CONDITION (like “closed”).

(If you would like to read about some EXCEPTIONS to the transitive aru rule, please check out page 17 of the Long Grammar Guide, available at

[http://www.japaneseaudiolessons.com/download-japanese-lessons/.](http://www.japaneseaudiolessons.com/download-japanese-lessons/))

In this case, we are using the transitive verb 閉める (shimeru), and we are describing a fixed condition, i.e., the closed window. According to the transitive aru rule, we must use aru (arimasu). Therefore, ANSWER # 1 IS CORRECT.

ANSWER # 2 IS INCORRECT because it violates the transitive aru rule by combining the te form of a transitive verb with imasu, when describing a fixed condition.

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Question # 5: "Imasu vs. Arimasu when using Transitive and Intransitive Verbs"

You're feeling a little warm. You notice that the window is closed and suspect that your friend closed it. You want to say, "The window is closed (by someone)."

Which of the following 4 Japanese sentences is correct in this situation?

1. 窓が閉めてあります (mado ga shimete arimasu)
2. 窓が閉めています (mado ga shimete imasu)
3. 窓が閉まっています (mado ga shimatte imasu)
4. 窓が閉まってあります (mado ga shimatte arimasu)

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The following exchange took place on Facebook after the above answer was posted:

Question: 複雑なことですよね (fukuzatsu koto desu yo ne) = "it's a complicated thing for sure, huh" ... I think te+aru is also some kind of passive in some cases e.g. 壁に何か書いてあります (kabe ni nanika ga kaite arimasu) = "There is something written on the wall."

Answer: そうですね (soo desu ne) = "that's so huh."

When you say, 壁に何か書いてあります (kabe ni nanika kaite arimasu) = "something is written on the wall," you are using the te form of the verb 書く (kaku). 書く (kaku) is a transitive verb, since you can say something like 手紙を書きます (tegami o kakimasu) = "I write a letter," where 手紙 (tegami) = "letter" is a direct object.

According to the TRANSITIVE ARU RULE, the te or de form of a TRANSITIVE verb is usually followed by ARU (or arimasu), when describing a FIXED CONDITION (as opposed to an ongoing action).

In this case, the fixed condition is the "something" that has been written on the wall (by contrast, an ongoing action would be something like "is writing"). Therefore, your sentence correctly uses aru (arimasu), rather than iru (imasu) after 書いて (kaite).

However, let's suppose that you wanted to describe this situation using the PASSIVE verb tense. Recall that, in a passive sentence, the subject is also an object that receives the effect of an action. In this case, the subject/object would be 何か (nanika) = "something." This subject/object would typically be followed by WA or GA [but it's OK to omit wa and ga after 何か (nanika), as you have done]. The doer of the action would usually be followed by NI, but we are omitting the doer in this sentence.

To form a PASSIVE VERB in Japanese, for a u verb, add ARERU to the root; for an ru verb, add RARERU to the root. In this case, 書く (kaku) is a u verb, so the passive form becomes 書かれる (kakareru).

書かれる (kakareru) is NOT a transitive verb, since it does not take a direct object. For example, you could NOT say 手紙を書かれています (tegami o kakarete imasu). Instead you would have to say 手紙が書かれています (tegami ga kakarete imasu) = “the letter is written.”

Since 書かれる (kakareru) is an INTRANSITIVE verb, its te form is ALWAYS followed by IRU (imasu), whether you are describing a fixed condition or an ongoing action.

With this in mind, you could use the PASSIVE form of 書く(kaku) to rephrase this sentence, as follows: 何か壁に書かれています (nanika kabe ni kakarete imasu) = 何かが壁に書かれています (nanika ga kabe ni kakarete imasu) = “something on the wall is written.”

If you want to learn more about the transitive aru rule, the passive tense and so forth, you are welcome to download our “Long Grammar Guide,” available at <http://www.japaneseaudiolessons.com/download-japanese-lessons/>.

Question: thanks for that really detailed answer again! I must admit, I already knew how to form the passive, it is really just when to use that and the te+aru construction, in some cases.

well I think here the problem is: te+aru implies that the resulting action was cause by someone since it is a transitive verb. But so does the passive, with or without mentioning by whom it was actually caused. So when to use what?!

So I read in some cases like 書いてある (kaite aru) = “it is written” or 置いてある (oite aru) = “it is placed” these verbs are used in that way to form some kind of passive....really complicated as I said.

Answer: You raise a good point. I think you're right.

To quote from englishpage.com, “In passive sentences, the thing receiving the action is the subject of the sentence...” They also say, “You can use the passive form if you think that the thing receiving the action is more important or should be emphasized. You can also use the passive form if you do not know who is doing the action or if you do not want to mention who is doing the action.”

When one says 壁に何かが書いてあります (kabe ni nanika ga kaite arimasu) = “something is written on the wall,” 何か (nanika) is the subject, and the subject has had something done to it, i.e., it has been written. This seems to satisfy the criteria for a passive sentence mentioned in the previous paragraph.

When one says 壁に何かが書かれています (kabe ni nanika ga kakarete imasu) = “something is written on the wall,” 何か (nanika) is still the subject that is having something done to it. This also satisfies the criteria for a passive sentence.

One obvious difference between the two sentences is that the first one uses aru (arimasu) while the second one uses iru (imasu). The reason for this is that the first one uses a transitive verb, which is always followed by aru when describing a fixed condition, while the second one uses an intransitive (passive) verb, which is always followed by iru, whether describing an ongoing

action or a fixed condition.

Of course, the first sentence has only one possible meaning, while the second sentence is ambiguous, since it can mean either "something is written on the wall" or "something is being written on the wall."

Anyway, it IS complicated, but still very interesting to me. Thanks for pointing out this relationship!

Question: yeah that's right and as I know from my friend Japanese as well as any other speaker of his own native language sometimes don't know themselves exactly when to use what or can't describe when to use what unless they are linguists. So it is often learning by doing and the more vocabulary you learn for example, the more you know what words suits the situation the most.

And yes it is really interesting. I am hoping for more lessons of you and you should be ready for maybe more questions from my side.