

## “は” と “が” の違い

### The Differences Between Wa and Ga

Deciding when to use が *ga* or は *wa* can be difficult. As Jay Rubin says in *Making Sense of Japanese*, “Even the most accomplished Japanese speaker of English will continue to make mistakes with ‘the’ and ‘a,’ and native speakers of English (who learn Japanese) will probably always have some degree of difficulty with は *wa* and が *ga*.” Here are some principles to consider when you are deciding which of these two particles is more appropriate.

1. Use は *wa* to indicate the **topic** of a sentence. For example, in the sentence あの人は先生です *ano hito wa sensei desu* (“as for that person over there, he is a teacher”), 人 *hito* is the *topic* of the sentence, not the subject. The subject is the silent pronoun “he” which is not expressed in Japanese but is understood. This silent pronoun can be seen when the sentence is translated: “as for that person over there, he is a teacher.”

2. Use が *ga* to indicate the **subject** of a sentence. A subject is something that **exists** or that **does something**. For example, in the sentence 田中さんがあそこにあります *tanakasan ga asoko ni imasu* (“Tanaka exists over there”), Tanaka exists. In the sentence 秘書が辞めました *hisho ga yamemashita* (“the secretary resigned”), the secretary does something.

3. Many Japanese sentences contain a **topic followed by** は *wa* and then a **subject followed by** が *ga*. For example, 象は鼻が長いです *zou wa hana ga nagai desu* (“as for the elephant, it has a long trunk”).

4. If you are **introducing** a **noun** (or pronoun) into conversation, use が *ga*. For example, the sentence 昨日田中さんが東京に来ました *kinou tanakasan ga toukyou ni kimashita* (“yesterday Tanaka came to Tokyo”) introduces the subject Tanaka.

5. If a **noun has already been introduced** into conversation, use は *wa*. For example, 明日彼は大阪に帰ります *ashita kare wa oosaka ni kaerimasu* means “tomorrow he will return to Osaka,” and it could be one of the next remarks you make about Tanaka.

6. To say that a noun is described by an **adjective**, using です *desu* or だ *da*, you may use **either** は *wa* or が *ga*:

a) Use が *ga* if you are referring to a **particular** noun, if you want to **single** a noun out **from a group**, or if you are **introducing** it as a subject. For example, 花がきれいです *hana ga kirei desu* (“the flower is pretty”) suggests that we are talking about only one flower, or we are singling one out from a group, or we are introducing flowers into the conversation.

b) Use は *wa* if you are referring to something **general**, or to **more than one thing**. For example, 花はきれいです *hana wa kirei desu* could mean “flowers in general are pretty” or “the flower (or flowers) we’ve been discussing is (are) pretty.” (Note that this sentence includes

as a subject the silent pronoun “they” which becomes visible when translated into English: “as for flowers, they are pretty.”)

7. Generally speaking, when using the “exist” verbs ある/あります *aru/arimasu* or いる/います *iru/imasu*, you should use が *ga*. For example, お金があります *okane ga arimasu* (“money exists”) and 人がいます *hito ga imasu* (“a person exists”).

However, if a clause ends in “**but,**” you may use は *wa* in clauses using あります *arimasu*. For example, お金はありますけど... *okane wa arimasu kedo...* (“there is money, but...”). The “but” in this clause may imply, for example, that you don’t have time to spend the money. By using は *wa* in this sentence ending with “but,” you suggest that there is a subject further along in the sentence (which may be left unstated).

8. After an **interrogative pronoun**, use が *ga*. For example, 誰が来ましたか *dare ga kimashita ka* (“who came?”) or 何がいいですか *nani ga ii desu ka* (“what is good?”).

You should also use が *ga* in **responding** to a question that contains such an interrogative pronoun. For example, you could respond to the two questions above by saying 恵子さんが来ました *keikosan ga kimashita* (“Keiko came”) and この本がいいです *kono hon ga ii desu* (“this book is good”).

9. If you are using この *kono*, その *sono*, あの *ano* or other **specific markers**, such as 今日 *kyou no* (today’s), then you **don’t need to use** が *ga* (unless you are responding to a question containing an interrogative pronoun) because your statement is already specific. For example, この部屋は狭いです *kono heya wa semai desu* (“this room is tight”) is correct, even if you are introducing the room into the conversation. If you said この部屋が狭いです *kono heya ga semai desu*, you would be over-emphasizing the point that this room in particular is tight.

10. When you are describing one of the **five senses**, use が *ga*. For example, いい匂いがする *ii nioi ga suru* (“it smells good”), and 甘い味がする *amai aji ga suru* (“it tastes sweet”).

11. If you want to show a **contrast between two competing topics**, use は *wa*. For example, 昼は厚いです、夜は寒いです *hiru wa atsui desu, yoru wa samui desu* (“the days are hot, the nights are cold”).

12. Use は *wa* after と *to* (used to show quotes) in **negative sentences**. For example, 高いとは思いません *takai to wa omoimasen* (“As for expensive, I don’t think so”).

13. In **subordinate clauses**, use が *ga*. For example, デビがフランスへ行くことを知っています *debi ga furansu e iku koto o shitte imasu* (“I am knowing that Debi will go to France”).

14. In some expressions, が *ga* is almost always used. For example, ミルクが欲しいです *miruku ga hoshii desu* (“I desire milk”), スペイン語がわかります *supeingo ga wakarimasu* (“I understand Spanish”), 日本語ができます *nihongo ga dekimasu* (“I can do Japanese”), 時間がかかります *jikan ga kakarimasu* (“it takes time”), テニスが上手です *tenisu ga jouzu desu* (“he’s good at tennis”), お腹が痛いです *onaka ga itai desu* (“the stomach hurts”), 砂糖がいります *satou ga irimasu* (“I need sugar”), and コーヒーが好きです *koohii ga suki desu* (“I like coffee”).

15. When stating a **simple equivalence** using だ *da* or です *desu*, e.g., “it’s a car” or “it’s Tanaka,” **don’t** use は *wa* or が *ga*. Instead say 車です *kuruma desu* or 田中さんです *tanakasan desu*. However, you must use は *wa* and が *ga* in more complex sentences employing です *desu*, e.g., 車がいいです *kuruma ga ii desu* (“the car is good”) or 田中さんは先生です *tanakasan wa sensei desu* (“as for Tanaka, he is a teacher”).

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