Particles 助詞

joshi · the big ten · little tags that say what each word is doing

One sentence, four particles

わたし は	きのう	ともだち と	こうえん で	サッカー を	しました。
watashi **wa**	kinō	tomodachi **to**	kōen **de**	sakkā **o**	shimashita.
topic: as for me	yesterday (no particle needed)	with a friend	place of the action: in the park	object: soccer	did it: played

Yesterday I played soccer with a friend in the park. は marks the topic, と with, で place of action, を object.

は — wa

A spotlight on stage. "As for X..." and the rest of the sentence talks about X.

Marks the topic. Written は, said wa.

わたし **は** がくせい です。
watashi **wa** gakusei desu. - I'm a student.

ねこ **は** かわいい です。
neko **wa** kawaii desu. - Cats are cute.

が — ga

A finger pointing. "Who? THIS one!" Whatever wears が is the news.

Marks the subject, usually the new information.

だれ **が** きました か。
dare **ga** kimashita ka. - Who came?

あ、ねこ **が** いる!
a, neko **ga** iru! - Oh, there's a cat!

を — o

A dartboard. The verb's dart lands on whatever wears を.

Marks the thing the verb acts on. Written を, said o.

すし **を** たべます。
sushi **o** tabemasu. - I eat sushi.

アニメ **を** みます。
anime **o** mimasu. - I watch anime.

> Tip: を almost never appears except as this particle. Spot it in a subtitle, look just before it, and you've found what the verb acts on.

に — ni

A pin on the map or the clock. Stick it on a place, a time or a person.

Four jobs: destination, time, where something exists, recipient.

がっこう **に** いきます。
gakkō **ni** ikimasu. - I go to school.

ろくじ **に** おきます。
rokuji **ni** okimasu. - I get up at six.

いえ **に** います。
ie **ni** imasu. - I'm at home.

ともだち **に** あげます。
tomodachi **ni** agemasu. - I give it to a friend.

で — de

A workbench: the place you do the job, and the tool you do it with.

Marks where the action happens, and with what. Where something just exists takes に instead (page 3).

こうえん **で** あそびます。
kōen **de** asobimasu. - I play in the park.

はし **で** たべます。
hashi **de** tabemasu. - I eat with chopsticks.

と — to

Two friends holding hands: X and Y, or you with X.

Means "and" between nouns, or "with" a person.

いぬ **と** ねこ が すき です。
inu **to** neko ga suki desu. - I like dogs and cats.

ともだち **と** いきます。
tomodachi **to** ikimasu. - I'm going with a friend.

の — no

A paper clip holding two nouns together. Works like English 's.

Links nouns: the first one describes the second.

これ は わたし **の** ほん です。
kore wa watashi **no** hon desu. - This is my book.

にほん **の** アニメ は おもしろい です。
nihon **no** anime wa omoshiroi desu. - Japanese anime is fun.

へ — e

A road sign pointing over the hill: "that way!"

Marks the direction you're heading. Written へ, said e.

にほん **へ** いきます。
nihon **e** ikimasu. - I'm going to Japan.

うち **へ** かえります。
uchi **e** kaerimasu. - I'm going home.

も — mo

A hand shooting up: "Me too!" It pushes は, が or を out of their seat.

Means "also". It replaces は, が or を rather than joining them.

わたし **も** がくせい です。
watashi **mo** gakusei desu. - I'm a student too.

すし **も** たべます。
sushi **mo** tabemasu. - I eat sushi too.

か — ka

A question mark you can hear. Put it at the end and the sentence asks.

Turns a sentence into a question. Between nouns it means "or".

アニメ は すき です **か**。
anime wa suki desu **ka**. - Do you like anime?

コーヒー **か** おちゃ を のみます。
kōhī **ka** ocha o nomimasu. - I'll drink coffee or tea.

More particles

nine more, then the little words that end anime sentences

から kara

From. After a reason: because.
A starting gun: the race starts here, or here's why it started.
にほん **から** きました。
nihon **kara** kimashita. - I came from Japan.
あつい **から**、みず を のみます。
atsui **kara**, mizu o nomimasu. - It's hot, so I'll drink water.

まで made

Until (time), as far as (place).
A finish-line tape: this far and no further.
ごじ **まで** はたらきます。
goji **made** hatarakimasu. - I work until five.
えき **まで** あるきます。
eki **made** arukimasu. - I walk as far as the station.

より yori

Than.
A seesaw: the word wearing より is the one being measured against.
ねこ は いぬ **より** ちいさい です。
neko wa inu **yori** chiisai desu. - Cats are smaller than dogs.
きょう は きのう **より** あつい です。
kyō wa kinō **yori** atsui desu. - Today is hotter than yesterday.

や ya

And, among others. The list isn't complete.
A shopping list that trails off into "and so on".
ねこ **や** いぬ が すき です。
neko **ya** inu ga suki desu. - I like cats and dogs, among others.
ペン **や** ノート を かいました。
pen **ya** nōto o kaimashita. - I bought pens and notebooks, among other things.

だけ dake

Only. Works with a normal, positive verb.
A velvet rope: only this one gets in.
みず **だけ** のみます。
mizu **dake** nomimasu. - I only drink water.
ひとつ **だけ** たべます。
hitotsu **dake** tabemasu. - I'll eat just one.

しか shika

Only, with a negative verb.
An empty wallet: "nothing but this". The verb has to be negative.
みず **しか** のみません。
mizu **shika** nomimasen. - I drink nothing but water.
ひゃくえん **しか** ありません。
hyakuen **shika** arimasen. - I only have 100 yen.

ぐらい / くらい gurai / kurai

About. Same meaning in both spellings.
A wobbling hand: roughly this much.
いちじかん **ぐらい** まちました。
ichijikan **gurai** machimashita. - I waited about an hour.
みっつ **くらい** たべました。
mittsu **kurai** tabemashita. - I ate about three.

とか toka

Things like. Often repeated after each item.
A casual shrug: X, Y, stuff like that. Common in speech.
アニメ **とか** ゲーム **とか** が すき です。
anime **toka** gēmu **toka** ga suki desu. - I like things like anime and games.

でも demo

Even. Or something.
A raised eyebrow (even X!), or an easy offer (X or something).
こども **でも** わかります。
kodomo **demo** wakarimasu. - Even a child gets it.
おちゃ **でも** のみません か。
ocha **demo** nomimasen ka. - Shall we have tea or something?

Sentence enders you hear in anime

ね ne	anyone "Right?" Invites you to agree.	きょう は あつい です **ね**。 kyō wa atsui desu **ne**. - It's hot today, isn't it?
よ yo	anyone "You know." Tells you something you may not know.	これ は おいしい です **よ**。 kore wa oishii desu **yo**. - This is tasty, you know.
よね yone	anyone "...right?" Checks that you share a thought.	これ、おいしい **よね**。 kore, oishii **yone**. - This is tasty, right?
かな kana	anyone, casual "I wonder." Often said half to yourself.	あした は はれる **かな**。 ashita wa hareru **kana**. - I wonder if it'll be sunny tomorrow.
の no	casual, soft A soft question. Rough characters often say んだ or のか instead.	どこ に いく **の**? doko ni iku **no**? - Where are you going?
な na	casual, leans male A musing "...huh". Everyone says いい な. After a dictionary-form verb: a blunt "don't!"	いい **な**。 ii **na**. - Nice. / Lucky you. いく **な**! iku **na**! - Don't go!
ぞ zo	rough, male-coded "I'm telling you." Also a warning. おれ is a casual male "I".	おれ は つよい **ぞ**。 ore wa tsuyoi **zo**. - I'm strong, I'm telling you.
ぜ ze	rough, male-coded A cocky "let's", or a pumped-up statement.	いこう **ぜ**! ikō **ze**! - Let's go!
さ sa	casual A filler, like "so" or "like". Ending a whole sentence with it leans male.	あの **さ**、ちょっと いい? ano **sa**, chotto ii? - Hey, um, got a sec?
わ wa	rising: feminine, mostly fiction Light emphasis. Said with a rising tone it's feminine and rare in real speech today. A flat わ is common from men and women alike, especially in western Japan and among younger speakers.	わたし も いく **わ**。 watashi mo iku **wa**. - I'm going too.
って tte	anyone, casual A casual quote: "they say", "he said".	ともだち は こない **って**。 tomodachi wa konai **tte**. - My friend says they're not coming.

Rough and gendered means how it sounds, not a law. A tough girl in anime can say ぞ on purpose. Copy ね and よ freely, and leave ぞ, ぜ and わ for listening until you know who you're talking to.

Don't mix these up

six pairs beginners trip over

は vs が

わたし **は** やります。
watashi **wa** yarimasu. - Me? I'll do it.

わたし **が** やります。
watashi **ga** yarimasu. - I'LL do it (me, not anyone else).

The news comes after は, and right before が. With は the point is what I'll do. With が the point is who.

に vs で

いえ **に** います。
ie **ni** imasu. - I'm at home.

いえ **で** たべます。
ie **de** tabemasu. - I eat at home.

に is where something IS, で is where something HAPPENS. います and あります (exist) take に. Actions done at a place take で, but a destination (いきます) still takes に.

に vs へ

がっこう **に** いきます。
gakkō **ni** ikimasu. - I go to school.

がっこう **へ** いきます。
gakkō **e** ikimasu. - I go to school.

With going verbs, both work. に pins the arrival point, へ points the direction, and に is more common in everyday speech. Only に does time and existence.

を vs が

すし **を** たべます。
sushi **o** tabemasu. - I eat sushi.

すし **が** すき です。
sushi **ga** suki desu. - I like sushi.

Eating is an action, liking isn't. すき is a describing word, not a verb, so the thing you like takes が. Same with じょうず (good at) and ほしい (want).

と vs や

いぬ **と** ねこ が います。
inu **to** neko ga imasu. - There's a dog and a cat.

いぬ **や** ねこ が います。
inu **ya** neko ga imasu. - There are dogs, cats and so on.

と is the whole list. や hints at more. Use と when you're naming everything, や when these are just examples.

から + まで together

いちじ **から** ごじ **まで** はたらきます。
ichiji **kara** goji **made** hatarakimasu. - I work from one to five.

うち **から** えき **まで** あるきます。
uchi **kara** eki **made** arukimasu. - I walk from home to the station.

They team up: から starts it, まで ends it. It works the same for clock times and for places.

Three things to remember

Particles come AFTER the word they mark. Think of a tag tied to the word's tail. English says "to Tokyo", Japanese says "Tokyo to".

ねこ **を** みます。
neko **o** mimasu. - I look at the cat.

とうきょう **に** いきます。
tōkyō **ni** ikimasu. - I go to Tokyo. Word for word: "Tokyo to go".

は, へ and を have a special sound as particles. は is said wa, へ is said e, を is said o. Inside an ordinary word, は and へ keep their normal sounds: はな hana (flower), へや heya (room).

Casual speech drops them. Friends in anime skip は, が and を all the time, and you just work it out from context. Keep them in polite sentences. Other particles get dropped less often.

ごはん たべた?
gohan tabeta? - Did you eat? (を has gone missing)

Practice

fill the gap · let the English decide

How: cover the right side with a strip of paper. Read the line, say the missing particle out loud, then slide the strip down to check. Next, hunt for the same particle in Kitsumi subtitles.

1	わたし ____ アニメ ____ みます。 watashi ___ anime ___ mimasu. - As for me, I watch anime.	は wa, を o
2	だれ ____ きました か。 dare ___ kimashita ka. - Who came?	が ga
3	ろくじ ____ おきます。 rokuji ___ okimasu. - I get up at six.	に ni
4	ねこ は いえ ____ います。 neko wa ie ___ imasu. - The cat is at home.	に ni
5	こうえん ____ あそびます。 kōen ___ asobimasu. - I play in the park.	で de
6	ともだち ____ サッカー を します。 tomodachi ___ sakkā o shimasu. - I play soccer with a friend.	と to
7	これ は わたし ____ ねこ です。 kore wa watashi ___ neko desu. - This is my cat.	の no
8	にほん ____ いきます。 nihon ___ ikimasu. - I'm heading toward Japan.	へ e に also OK
9	わたし ____ いきます。 watashi ___ ikimasu. - I'm going too.	も mo
10	すし は すき です ____。 sushi wa suki desu ___. - Do you like sushi?	か ka
11	いちじ ____ ごじ ____ はたらきます。 ichiji ___ goji ___ hatarakimasu. - I work from one until five.	から kara, まで made
12	いぬ は ねこ ____ おおきい です。 inu wa neko ___ ōkii desu. - Dogs are bigger than cats.	より yori
13	ペン ____ ノート を かいました。 pen ___ nōto o kaimashita. - I bought pens and notebooks, among other things.	や ya casually とか
14	おちゃ ____ のみます。 ocha ___ nomimasu. - I only drink tea.	だけ dake
15	ひゃくえん ____ ありません。 hyakuen ___ arimasen. - I only have 100 yen.	しか shika
16	いちじかん ____ まちました。 ichijikan ___ machimashita. - I waited about an hour.	ぐらい gurai or くらい
17	アニメ ____ ゲーム ____ が すき です。 anime ___ gēmu ___ ga suki desu. - I like things like anime and games.	とか toka, とか toka
18	こども ____ わかります。 kodomo ___ wakarimasu. - Even a child gets it.	でも demo にも also OK
19	きょう は あつい です ____。 kyō wa atsui desu ___. - It's hot today, isn't it?	ね ne よね also OK
20	これ は おいしい です ____。 kore wa oishii desu ___. - This is tasty, you know.	よ yo
21	あした は はれる ____。 ashita wa hareru ___. - I wonder if it'll be sunny tomorrow.	かな kana
22	いこう ____! ikō ___! - Let's go! (rough, cocky)	ぜ ze
23	ともだち は こない ____。 tomodachi wa konai ___. - My friend says they're not coming. (casual quote)	って tte