Everyday particles

Oboeru 覚える

Japanese marks the job of each word with a small word that follows it. Get these right and word order stops mattering; get them wrong and a correct sentence still sounds off.

The ten you need first

Particle	What it marks	Example	English
は	the topic — "as for …" *written は, said **wa***	私**は**学生です	As for me, I'm a student
が	the subject, when it is new or being picked out	雨**が**降っています	It's raining
を	the thing the action is done to *written を, said **o***	水**を**飲みます	I drink water
に	a point: a time, a destination, a person receiving	七時**に**起きます 友達**に**貸します	I get up at seven I lend it to a friend
で	where an action happens, or what you do it with	家**で**作ります 電車**で**行きます	I make it at home I go by train
へ	direction you head in *written へ, said **e***	東京**へ**行きます	I'm heading to Tokyo
と	with someone; and, listing everything	友達**と**遊びます	I hang out with a friend
も	too, also — it replaces は, が or を	私**も**行きます	I'm going too
の	of, 's — joins two nouns	私**の**本	my book
から … まで	from … until …	九時**から**五時**まで**	from nine to five

The two choices that trip everyone up

Choice	Use the first when…	Use the second when…
は or が	you are saying something **about** a known thing. この本**は**高いです — as for this book, it's expensive.	the word itself is the **news**, or answers "which one?". この本**が**高いです — *this* book is the expensive one.
に or で	に marks a point you arrive at or something sits at. 家**に**います — I'm at home.	で marks where something **happens**. 家**で**飲みます — I drink at home.

Fixed pairs worth memorising whole

- **〜が好きです** like — 音楽が好きです
- **〜が分かります** understand — 日本語が分かります
- **〜をください** please give me — 水をください
- **〜に会います** meet someone — 友達に会います
- **〜で行きます** go by — 電車で行きます
- **〜は〜が** topic + detail — 私は頭が痛いです

Watch out

Three particles are not read as written. は = **wa**, へ = **e**, を = **o** — but only when they are doing a particle's job.

Leaving through a place takes を. バス**を**降ります *get off the bus*, 家**を**出ます *leave home*.

Two things you get free

Word order relaxes. Because the particle carries the job, 水を家で飲みます and 家で水を飲みます both work. Only the verb must stay last.

Ending particles set the tone. 〜ね checks you agree; 〜よ tells someone something new.

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