

Kanji Search FAQ

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General

About Me

Hi, my name's Mark. I'm a German/American software engineer, Japanese language enthusiast, and creator of kanjisearch.com

I started using [WaniKani](https://www.wanikani.com) on September 1, 2017 to learn how to read Japanese kanji and vocabulary. I reached level 60 on October 16, 2018. I still use WaniKani daily because it's such an amazing study tool.

FYI: I finished WaniKani at breakneck speed. WaniKani has enough words for a 3+ year first pass at a healthy pace.

I moved on to studying WaniKani Japanese-to-English vocabulary in reverse English-to-Japanese order for my second and third pass using another Spaced Repetition System (SRS) called Anki. Translating English words to Japanese helped me read with more confidence and pull words out of thin air (without needing kanji as a visual crutch). I also learned to think in terms of kanji.

Even though I switched to Anki, I continued to use WaniKani as my dictionary and note-taking app. I found ways to link my kanji and vocabulary decks back to WaniKani to keep up with WaniKani mnemonics and radicals (building blocks for kanji).

I continued to reactivate 5 old kanji (Japanese-to-English) and 10 old vocabulary words (English-to-Japanese) per day in Anki until mid 2023. After that, I switched to practicing real-world Japanese by reading manga and playing games in Japanese (often using ChatGPT as a Japanese private tutor).

Why build Kanji Search?

I spent 3+ years filling up WaniKani note sections, since I realized the value of contextual notes. By contextual notes I mean notes that answer common questions or mistakes, in the context of the current word, without having to open multiple tabs while searching for answers.

I financed myself for over 6 months to create:

- kanjisearch.com
- An admin portal to keep the data up to date
- A [user script](#) to embed kanjisearch data directly into [wanikani.com](https://www.wanikani.com) kanji and vocabulary pages.

I did all of this as a passion project to publish and share my kanji and vocabulary notes in a useful way. I still use my notes everyday and find them super helpful even 7+ years later. I'm super proud of my notes, and I'm excited to share them with you.

What's the TLDR (too long; didn't read)?

Kanji Search is an unofficial companion website to WaniKani. Kanji Search shows additional notes for Japanese kanji and vocabulary such as groups of related words (similar kanji, pronunciations, meanings, etc.), English-to-Japanese mnemonics (since WaniKani already has Japanese-to-English mnemonics), and other helpful remarks/notes.

Who's the target audience?

Kanji Search is for serious Japanese language learners who already know how to read the Japanese phonetic alphabets (hiragana ひらがな and katakana カタカナ) and know a fair amount of kanji 漢字. If you're just starting your Japanese reading journey, then please start with WaniKani. Come back when you're level 20+ and use Kanji Search as a companion app.

A large portion of the notes on Kanji Search are dedicated to the grouping of related words (kanji or vocabulary) to provide context and easy navigation between them. An advanced level is recommended because the sheer amount and size of groups, and the similarity of words within the groups, can be overwhelming for new learners (and anyone really). This is especially the case when high level words that you won't see for years are mixed in with low level familiar words. It can be discouraging to see how much you have not learned yet.

A WaniKani background will help you understand Kanji Search notes better. This is because Kanji Search notes reference WaniKani radicals (building blocks for kanji) and personalities from WaniKani mnemonics. Basically, it helps to be "in on" the inside jokes.

Another thing to consider is that many notes are actually English-To-Japanese mnemonics, so Kanji Search will be of additional value to you if you also have an interest in studying English-To-Japanese.

Why does Kanji Search look like a WaniKani clone?

The purpose of Kanji Search is to share my notes, which I own according to WaniKani's Terms and Conditions. The tricky thing is that my notes are tightly coupled to WaniKani data. In order for my notes to be useful to others, they have to be searchable/discoverable, and they have to have a minimum amount of information about the words they describe.

I tried to walk a fine line and took special precautions not to infringe on WaniKani copyright by:

- Not having a level-up or progression system
- Not having a spaced-repetition system
- Not including WaniKani radicals
- Not including WaniKani pronunciation audios
- Not including WaniKani mnemonics or context sentences
- Not including WaniKani content that would require a WaniKani subscription
- Contacting WaniKani to ask for permission and receiving it

The UI design of Kanji Search looks very similar to WaniKani because I think it makes sense to show basic WaniKani kanji/vocabulary data in a WaniKani-like format. It's also a nod to WaniKani and their excellent design/engineering. I learned a lot by looking at their HTML structure and focus on responsive design and accessibility.

I took inspiration from WaniKani, but didn't copy any code. I looked at how WaniKani did things, learned from it, and reimplemented my own version from scratch in my own system according to my own preferences.

Is Tofugu/WaniKani okay with this?

Yes. I contacted Tofugu/WaniKani and received permission to publish the Kanji Search website and user script on the condition that they remain free.

Is Kanji Search free?

Yes, but...

Do you love Kanji Search notes and use them every day? Have you donated this month? Please consider [donating](#) to show your support. Donations help keep the service running and fund new updates and features. How much is up to you. Enough to buy a cup of coffee, or a meal if you're feeling generous.

The Kanji Search website and user script were expensive to build (over 6 months of full-time unpaid work) and continue to be expensive to maintain since data is hosted by my own service and database. I'd hate to have to compromise the service in the future due to rising maintenance costs and a lack of donations. Even small donations add up!

Is there a mobile app?

No, but kanjisearch.com was built to look good on any browser, device, or screen size. Visiting the website on a mobile phone actually gives the option to install the website as if it were a mobile app.

Why is the website called Kanji Search?

I was looking for a simple and self-explanatory domain name with the word "kanji" in it. kanjinotes.com was taken, but kanjisearch.com was available. Search makes sense since the website is all about searching via the search bar or via groups of related words.

Search Results

Why was my search term not found?

The database only contains WaniKani words. WaniKani is a kanji learning platform and thus only has words that are commonly spelled using kanji. There are many words that don't use kanji or are not commonly spelled using kanji.

Note that WaniKani is pretty comprehensive and has 2,000+ kanji. WaniKani has most of the Jo-yo-kanji, which is the regulated list of "ordinary use" kanji. You can read more on [wikipedia](#).

Why are there so many search results?

Search works more or less the same as on WaniKani. Words can have multiple meanings and readings. Search result summaries only show the first meaning and reading for each result even if the result was found because of a match with an alternative meaning or reading. Why a result was matched usually becomes clear when clicking on the result to view all of its meanings and readings. Also note that searching for "cat" will match not only Cat but also Catch, Allocate, etc.

Why are there duplicate pink/purple search results?

A character with a pink background is a kanji. A character with a purple background is a vocabulary word. A character can be both a kanji and a vocabulary. They are separate search results because they have separate information and notes.

Notes (Groups/Remarks)

What's so special about Kanji Search notes?

Mistakes are not random. Japanese learners around the world make the same mistakes for the same reasons multiple times until they figure out what they are confusing with what and why. Being able to successfully reverse engineer the exact reason for why your brain made a mistake is not a given. It requires effort, time, and luck to hunt down mistakes. You might be able to figure out why you made a specific mistake one day (because the right things were coincidentally fresh in your mind), but you might not be able to figure out why you made the same mistake for the same reason again in the future unless you took notes or have access to someone else's notes.

Notes are a long-term time-saving investment. They require effort and time to record, but are well worth it for repeated mistakes. Nonetheless, notes are still way too time consuming to write and maintain at such a large scale (2,000+ kanji and 6,500+ vocabulary) for most people.

Kanji Search notes to the rescue! Kanji Search notes are useful for Japanese language learners because:

- Notes are highly structured and consistent.
- Word groups make it easy to compare similar words and thus understand common mistakes in the context of the current word.
- Grouped words are interlinked, which makes navigation between words and notes easy.
- English-to-Japanese mnemonics are self-explanatory since the English meaning is always capitalized to make it stand out and the English phonetic keywords are always followed by hiragana pronunciation guides.
- Notes are kept up to date programmatically using sophisticated admin tools so you don't have to.

What are word groups?

Word groups show visually, phonetically, or conceptually similar kanji and vocabulary words side-by-side for comparison. A word can be in multiple groups, and a group can have multiple words. A group is shown on the details pages for each word in the group.

Groups usually don't mix kanji and vocabulary entries. In general, a group on a kanji page will only group kanji, and a group on a vocabulary page will only group vocabulary.

Can you list some example word groups?

Kanji group examples:

<https://www.kanjisearch.com/kanji/四>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/kanji/右>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/kanji/布>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/kanji/州>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/kanji/江>

Vocabulary group examples:

<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/虫>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/日光>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/火星>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/日曜日>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/野球>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/塩>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/泥水>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/刑事>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/風潮>
<https://www.kanjisearch.com/vocabulary/街灯>

These examples just scratch the surface. It's hard to describe the sheer quantity, depth, and value of word groups with just a handful of examples. Hopefully, they will bring you joy and continue to surprise you for years to come. They took years of ninja discipline to create, and I still work on them everyday.

How are word group entries structured?

Kanji group entry structure:

中 (チュウ、なか) Middle, In, Inside, Center

- 中 is the kanji character. Clicking it will navigate to the kanji's details page.
- チュウ is an On'yomi reading. The katakana alphabet is used to indicate that it's On'yomi.
- なか is a Kun'yomi reading. The hiragana alphabet is used to indicate that it's Kun'yomi.
- "Middle" is the primary English meaning.
- "In, Inside, Center" are alternative English meanings.

Vocabulary group entry structure:

中々 (なかなか) Very, Considerably, Quite

- 中々 are the kanji characters. Clicking them will navigate to the vocabulary's details page.
- なかなか is the reading.
- "Very" is the primary English meaning.
- "Considerably, Quite" are alternative English meanings.

Why are random words grouped together?

There are many different categories of kanji and vocabulary groups. Groups are unlabeled due to technical constraints, but it's usually obvious why words are grouped the way they are.

Common kanji groups link:

- Kanji that look similar
- Kanji that share radicals (building blocks) or compound radicals
- Kanji with one or more shared English keywords

Common vocabulary groups link:

- Transitive/intransitive verb pairs
- Verbs that use the same kanji
- A noun with the suru (auxiliary helper verb meaning "to do") version of the same noun
- Vocabulary with one or more shared English meanings
- Vocabulary with similar readings
- Vocabulary with the same kanji, but in a different order
- Vocabulary with different kanji, but with the exact same reading
- Vocabulary for related concepts (e.g. sunlight & moonlight, names of planets, days of the week, baseball related terms, etc.)
- Vocabulary with its component vocabulary, e.g. Word A + Word B = Word AB

Shared English meanings that are homographs are also often grouped together. Homographs are words that are spelled the same, but differ in meaning or pronunciation. The grouping of homographs is intentional because confusing them is common when studying English-to-Japanese flashcards that provide little context other than a list of English meanings.

The above categories are just what I could think of off the top of my head. If you come across groups that you don't understand, then just ignore them. Maybe you will make a mistake in the future and discover that a previously random seeming group links the exact words that you confused.

What are remarks?

Remarks could be "Yuri says X" statements, English-to-Japanese mnemonics, or other helpful remarks/notes. Basically, anything that's not a group of words.

Here's an example English-to-Japanese mnemonic for 風潮:
The latest food ふう Trend was started by Mrs. Chou ちょう

Note that Trend is capitalized to highlight it as the English meaning. Also note that the English phonetic keywords (food and Mrs. Chou) are followed by hiragana pronunciation guides.

Who's Yuri?

Yuri is my Japanese wife. Yuri means lily (flower) in Japanese.

FYI: Yuri is a relatively common female name in Japan. Lilies are a symbol of femininity and purity. Yuri says she's never heard of the Yuri Genre :P

Why are some mnemonics offensive?

Kanji Search mnemonics are intended to be memorable short stories encoded with information. They are written to be funny, shocking, absurd, gender stereotyped, controversial, etc. on purpose. Basically, anything goes if it aids memory. The mnemonics are meant for English speaking learners of the Japanese language to read in private.

Disclaimer: publishing mnemonics on the internet is a careful balancing act. I tried to employ a fair amount of self-restraint and sensitivity, but some mnemonics might have slipped through the cracks. Please send change requests to support@kanjisearch.com

Why do some mnemonics mention Koichi?

Kanji Search mnemonics are original, but reference personalities from WaniKani mnemonics because that's where Kanji Search mnemonics originated from. Kanji Search has no relationship to WaniKani or its CEO, Koichi. Any mnemonic references to Koichi are actually referring to some other guy named Koichi. Everything is made up. Although some references to Koichi are negative, there are plenty of other neutral and positive references.

FYI: I submitted a list of every mnemonic that mentions Koichi to WaniKani, and they said it's fine. Apparently Koichi got a kick out of reading them 😊

Why are groups or remarks/mnemonics missing for specific words?

Not all words have notes. It's common for there to not be any notes for a word. It's also common for a word to only have groups and no remarks (hints, mnemonics, etc.) or vice versa.

My goal was not to invent English-to-Japanese mnemonics for every word in the database. Instead, I allowed my notes to evolve naturally. I pruned and edited my notes over many years to provide a high level of quality. I only recorded clever ideas and discoveries that stood out above the rest. Usually, these were ideas and discoveries that I had on multiple occasions before realizing that I should write them down.

Can I add my own notes?

There's currently no way for users to add their own notes. I also don't recommend adding Kanji Search style word groupings to WaniKani note sections because it's hard to maintain and keep up to date. It's easy to underestimate how exponentially time consuming it is to link every word with every other similar word in a language as gigantic and confusing/contextual as the Japanese language.

If you insist, you can find my "genesis" user script [here](#). It's what set me on my current path many years ago and made all of this possible.

User Script

What are user scripts?

User scripts are open-source javascript files that automatically run for specific URLs. They can inject HTML, JS, and CSS to change the appearance of pages or add features. A user script manager browser plugin such as Tampermonkey for Chrome is required to install and run user scripts. See [Greasy Fork](#) for more details and installation instructions. Greasy Fork is basically a free app store for (generally) free user scripts.

Is there a Kanji Search user script for WaniKani?

Yes. See the [installation page](#) for more details and screenshots.

User Accounts

Why create a Kanji Search user account?

Currently, the only reason to create an account is to turn OFF the "On'yomi as Katana" App Setting. It's ON by default when not logged in.

Where/how are login credentials stored?

Username/password registration/login and Google login are handled by a cloud service called Google Firebase Auth. Google takes care of everything, including password recovery. The service is robust, secure, and used by websites around the world. Your password is never sent to kanjisearch.com servers. This goes without saying, but not even Google can read your password since it's hashed and can't be decrypted.

Tech

Found a bug?

Please report bugs to support@kanjisearch.com, preferably with a description, reproduction steps, device information, and a screenshot or GIF if it's not obvious or easy to explain.

What's the tech stack?

This website was built using TypeScript (100%), Svelte, SvelteKit, Carbon Components Svelte, Firebase Auth, PostgreSQL hosted on AWS RDS, and Prisma.

SvelteKit is a web framework with first class support for Server Side Rendering (SSR). SSR improves page load speeds and makes pages less reliant on JavaScript. I put in extra effort to make sure that all kanjisearch pages support SSR.

Pages are also:

- Responsive (meaning they support many different screen sizes and devices)
- Keyboard navigable
- Accessible (to people using screen readers)