

Japanese

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Japanese Learning Notes

?? (de wa) vs ?? (ni wa)

Core Rule

Both 場所 and 場所 make the location the **topic** of the sentence.

The difference comes from the particle underneath:

Pattern	Base Particle	Main Meaning	Ask Yourself
場所	で	Action happens at this place	What happens there?
場所	に	Something exists there / destination / fact about that place	What is there?

?? (de wa)

Use 場所 when talking about **an action that happens at a location**.

Think:

“As for this place, what happens here?”

Examples

Japanese	English
学校で勉強します。	At school, I study.
公園で野球をします。	At the park, I play baseball.
ウォルマートで買い物します。	At Walmart, I shop.
日本ではよく寿司を食べます。	In Japan, people often eat sushi.

Notice all of these involve **actions**:

- study
- play
- shop
- eat

?? (ni wa)

Use 何 when talking about **what exists at a location** or **a fact about that location**.

Think:

“As for this place, what is there?”

Examples

Japanese	English
先生が学校にいます。	There are teachers at school.
鴨が公園にいます。	There are ducks at the park.
ウォルマートにはバナナがあります。	Walmart has bananas.
日本には富士山があります。	Japan has Mt. Fuji.

Notice these are **existence** statements.

Compare the Difference

Walmart

Exists

“ウォルマートにはバナナがあります。

Walmart has bananas.

Action

[illegible]

I buy bananas at Walmart.

School

Exists

[illegible]

There are teachers at school.

Action

“ ”

I study at school.

Park

Exists

“ ”

There are ducks at the park.

Action

“ ”

Ducks swim at the park.

Time vs Place

One thing that confused me:

🇬🇧 **does NOT mark time.**

Time uses 🇬🇧 .

Correct	Meaning
🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧	I sleep at 3.
🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧	I work on Monday.
🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧	I sleep at home.

Notice:

- **3 o'clock** is a **time** → 🇬🇧
- **Home** is a **place** → 🇬🇧

You can even combine them:

“🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧🇬🇧

I sleep at home at 3.

About ?

The 🇬🇧 in 🇬🇧🇬🇧 and 🇬🇧🇬🇧 does **not** change the basic job of 🇬🇧 or 🇬🇧 .

Instead, it adds:

- topic
- emphasis
- contrast

Think:

🇬🇧

"As for..."

Examples:

“ ”

As for Japan, there is Mt. Fuji.

“ ”

As for Japan, people eat sushi.

Beginner Cheat Sheet

If you're asking...	Use
What happens there?	→
What is there?	→
Where are you going?	
When does it happen?	

My Mental Model

□

└ Destination

└ Existence

└ Time

□

└ Place where an action happens

Add □

↓

□□ = "As for this place/time/person..."

□□ = "As for this place..."

Easy Memory Trick

Ask one question:

What happens there?

- □ □□

What is there?

- □ □□

NI vs De

2. Grammar — に vs で — 3 minutes

A useful mental model is:

に → where something goes/is

で → where something happens

So:

ジムに行きます。

I go **to** the gym.

But:

ジムで運動します。

I exercise **at** the gym.

With **に**, the gym is the destination.

With **で**, the gym is the setting for the action.