

# Communication Breakdown

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A common complaint among native English teachers is that they sometimes feel as though they are an afterthought at their schools. Job expectations, performance evaluations, and even simple things like class cancelations or schedule changes are sometimes not communicated to NETs. In short, there is often a breakdown in communication between JTEs and NETs. This situation leads to a more stressful than necessary working environment for NETs and JTEs alike. So, what can be done to improve the working experience for everyone?

A good starting point is finding out the level of the native English teacher's Japanese ability. Many times the NET has some ability to read and speak Japanese and can therefore be given a copy of the schedule that all of the Japanese teachers receive. If the teacher has little or no Japanese reading ability then designating a Japanese English teacher as a "go to" person in cases where the NET has specific questions will allow the NET to feel comfortable about approaching someone for help. If the designated teacher feels that this is a burden, perhaps the responsibility can be rotated among JTEs on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis.

Assuredly, Japanese teachers have many responsibilities and having to look after another teacher is just one more task on a seemingly endless list of tasks. To make this task easier, it can help both parties if the JTEs give clear instructions to the NET regarding their work responsibilities, lesson planning and expectations in the classroom. It can be extremely stressful for NETs if they don't have a clear idea of what the JTE expects of them during their lessons together. As uncomfortable as it might be for some JTEs to speak frankly with their NET regarding their performance, an honest assessment usually proves to be beneficial for both teachers.

Though NETs do not usually have as many responsibilities as a typical JTE, this does not mean that they have an easy job or a stress free life in Japan. JTEs should keep in mind that the NET is not only working in an unfamiliar country but also trying to live here, and so taking care of simple daily tasks which amount to nothing for JTEs can sometimes be overwhelming ordeals for the NET. It is exceedingly supportive when JTEs offer to assist when difficulties arise for the NET outside of the workplace. True, NETs can make their own lives easier by studying Japanese and JTEs should encourage them to do so. JTEs that are willing, and have even a bit of free time, might offer to tutor them in Japanese. It could even be a wonderful opportunity for the JTE to improve their English as well. Why not think of it as a good opportunity for a language exchange?

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that NETs are asked to teach with various kinds of teachers, in a variety of classroom situations, and with JTEs who may have completely different personalities and teaching styles. The NET is tasked with being extremely flexible. This might be the most stressful part of the NETs experience working in Japan. If JTEs make an attempt to understand the NETs perspective, and be flexible themselves, they can improve the working environment and make the NET feel as though their views are respected and their work appreciated. Additionally, though it is true that most Japanese are extremely polite, busy Japanese teachers might overlook something as simple as saying thank you to the NET after a hard days work. It comes down to this: if you treat the NET like a valuable member of the team, they will tend to perform better and feel more comfortable in the workplace. It all starts with communication.