# Japanese Lesson 8: Janken

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| **Janken words** | | | |
| **#** | **English meaning** | **Japanese (rough pronunciation)** | **Japanese (written in Japanese)** |
| **1** | Rock-paper-scissors (game) | Janken | じゃんけん |
| **2** | Rock | Guu | グー |
| **3** | Paper | Paa | パー |
| **4** | Scissors | Choki | チョキ |
| **5** | First | Saisho | さいしょ |
| **6** | Tie | Aiko | あいこ |
| **7** | Looks like | Desho | でしょう |
| **8** | Punishment | Batsu | ばつ |

**Janken**

How to play janken

1. Hold your hand in a fist.
2. Both players say the phrase together: “Saisho wa guu”*.* When you say “guu,” show your fist in a “rock.” “Saisho wa guu” means “First comes rock.”
3. Both players say the phrase together: janken pon. When you say “pon,” display your choice of rock, paper, or scissors.
4. If both players show the same choice of rock/paper/scissors, it’s a tie and both players say “aiko desho” and play again. “Aiko desho” means “it looks like a tie.”

Janken can also be used for expensive, high-stakes decisions. In 2005, a Japanese businessman decided to auction off his art collection which included masterpieces from renowned European artists like Cézanne, Picasso, and van Gogh. But he ran into a bit of a snag when it came time to decide which of the world's two most famous auction houses, Christie's and Sotheby's, would get the rights to auction off his magnificent collection. So how did this businessman make his decision? He made the two auction houses compete in a game of janken. The two auction houses spent a weekend strategizing, planning their one, critical move; and on Monday, the competition took place. The New York Times paints a picture of the scene:

Instead of the usual method of playing the game with the hands, the teams were given a form explaining the rules. They were then asked to write one word in Japanese – rock, paper or scissors – on the paper.

After each house had entered its decision, a Maspro manager looked at the choices. Christie's was the winner: scissors beat paper.

"We were told immediately and then asked to go downstairs to another room and wait, while the forms went off to headquarters to be approved," Mr. Rendell said. He described the atmosphere in the room as "difficult," saying both sides were forced to "make small talk."

**Additional rules and variants**

“Batsu” means punishment. You can play janken with a batsu – some kind of punishment for the loser.

Kids will try to trick you by saying “saisho wa paa” instead of “saisho wa guu”, and will try to “win” before you’ve even really started the game. This is a mischevious thing to do. Some kids get really into it and try to outsmart each other by saying “saisho wa choki” to win against the kids who say “saisho wa paa”, etc.

You can also play “acchi muite hoi.” In this variant, the winner points their finger at the loser’s face, says “acchi muite hoi,” which means “look that way”, and tries to guess the direction (up, down, left, or right) the loser will move their face.