

## N2 Grammar: つつ Strategy Guide

つつ has two main uses in Japanese, first as an auxiliary verb, and second as a conjunction. When used as an auxiliary verb it expresses an action in progress and takes verbs that show some kind of change like なる or 減る (へる) and always has ある after it. Here's a quick look at the formation:

なる → なり~~ます~~ → なりつつある

ガソリン価格は どんどん 高く なりつつある。

がそりんかかくは どんどん たかく なりつつある。

Gasoline prices are getting more and more expensive.

This is considered 硬い or a bit stiff. You wouldn't normally hear this in conversation. You are more likely to see it in a newspaper or magazine article talking about trends or possibly a book.

The other use of つつ is as a conjunction meaning 'at the same time'. It is used to talk about two actions that are occurring at the same time. Both actions are of equal importance.

思う → おもい~~ます~~ → おもいつつ

産まれたばかりの 子供を 思いつつ、 新し仕事を 探し始める。

うまれたばかりの こどもを おもいつつ、 あたらしいしごとを さがしはじめる。

While thinking about his newborn child, he started looking for a new job.

Again this is pretty stiff, so it is not usually used in conversation. Instead ながら is used in conversation more. It also more used for actions that have some length to them like 考える or 相談する and not quick actions like 開ける or 着く. It also tends to be used with emotions or thoughts.

This can also be used as a conjunction to have the meaning of 'although'. For example,

酒を 飲み過ぎるのは ダメと 分かりつつ、 友達と 過ごす ときは 飲まずに いられない。

sakeを のみすぎるのは だめと わかりつつ、 ともだちと すごす ときは のまずに いられない。

Although I know over-drinking alcohol is bad, I can't help myself when I am with my friends.

Again, this is stiff, and usually only found in writing.

## How does this look on the JLPT?

Most likely they will try a few tricks on you. The first one is the difference between つつ and つつある. They might try to test to see if you remember the difference between those two nuances or not. Also, they will test between ばかり「だ・で」 and つつある, which can both be used to talk about a trend.

They may also test you over the use of つつ as a conjunction compared to 最中だ and としている, which can be sometimes be used in similar situations but have different meanings.

### つつある vs. ばかりだ

つつある and ばかりだ can both be used to talk about trends, but ばかりだ has a negative connotation to it where as つつある is more neutral. For example the following sentence is okay,

毎日 ジムに いているけど 太く なるばかりだ。

まいにち ジムに いているけど ふとく なるばかりだ。

I go to the gym every day, but I just keep getting fatter and fatter.

Also, ばかりだ is not as stiff as つつある and so is used in conversation more as well.

Note, that the same sentence can be written using つつある, but it would sound a bit strange:

毎日 ジムに いているけど 太く つつある。

まいにち ジムに いているけど ふとく つつある。

I go to the gym every day, but I just keep getting fatter and fatter.

This would sound pretty stuffy and a bit strange to say 'off the cuff' without a prepared speech.

### つつ vs. 最中に

最中に has the meaning of 'right in the middle of ...sth else happened'. It has a bit of an emotional nuance compared to the regular 中. It is different than つつ in that the second action is a quick action. For example,

話している 最中に 電話を 切られた。

はなしている さいちゅうに でんわを きられた。

Right in the middle of our conversation, the phone cut off.

Notice that the two actions aren't happening at the same time and the first action is something that takes time where as the second action is a quick action.

## つつ vs. としている

としている can best be translated as 'to be just about to' or 'to be on track to'. It is used to talk about a momentary change that is about to happen, when something else happens. For example,

ロンドンのオリンピックが始まろうとしているとき、警察官の数が増やされた。

ロンドンのおりんぴっくが始まろうとしているとき、けいさつかんのかづかふやされた。

The number of police has been increased before the start of the London Olympics.

Again, this is stiff like つつ, but the actions aren't taking place at the same time. The first action is a quick action and the second action takes place just before it. To be honest though, this grammar structure is fairly rare and you might not see it on the test.

## Example Questions

### Sentential Questions I

1 - TVゲームを \_\_\_\_\_ 電気が消える。

- 1) しつつある                      2) する最中に  
3) しようとしている              4) つつ

2 - 妻を \_\_\_\_\_、私の家を選びたい。

- 1) 相談しようとしているとき    2) 相談しつつある  
3) 相談しつつ                      4) 相談の最中に

3 - 下町の建設が\_\_\_\_\_。

- 1) 完成しつつ。                      2) 完成しつつある。  
3) 完成するばかりだ。            4) 完成しようとしている。

### Sentential Questions II

4 - 傘を\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \*\_ \_\_\_\_\_ しまった。

- 1) 忘れて                      2) つつ  
3) いこうと思い                  4) 持って

5 - 地震の\_\_\_\_\_ \*\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ しつつある。

- 1) 市の                      2) あと、  
3) 回復                      4) 景気が

1) 2 - The second action is a quick action that happens right in the middle of the video game, so 最中に is the best choice.

2) 3 - The speaker is consulting his wife while he is choosing a new house.

3) 4 - We can use しようとしている to mean something is just about to be X, in this case completed. つつつある and ばかりだ have a sense that the action is going to keep on continuing and we can't use つつ here.

4) 2 (4 3 2 1)

5) 1 (2 1 4 3)