

N3 Grammar: とたん(に) Cheat Sheet

The adverb とたん is used to talk about an action not under your control that occurs at the moment something else did. It can be roughly translated as 'as soon as' or 'at the same time as'. Here's the structure:

1) past tense verb + とたん (に)

聞く → 聞いたとたん (に) (as soon as I heard)

見る → 見たとたん (に) (as soon as I saw)

研修会場に 到着した とたんに きんちょう した。

けんしゅうかいじょうに とうちゃくした とたんに きんちょう した。

As soon as I arrived at the training facility I got nervous.

There is also a rarely used form that I haven't been able to find any example sentences for in the Tanaka Corpus nor have I heard it on the 'street', but it does still technically exist:

2) past tense verb + ら + とたん (に)

聞く → 聞いたら、とたん (に) (as soon as I heard)

見る → 見たら、とたん (に) (as soon as I saw)

きれいな 先生を 見たら とたんに どきどき した。

きれいな せんせいを 見たら とたんに どきどき した。

As soon as I saw the pretty teacher, my heart started throbbing.

One thing to look out for is that the second action has to be something beyond your control. Compare the next two sentences:

サムが 今日ほと言った とたんに ~~部屋を~~ 出た。

さむが こんにちほと言った とたんに ~~△やを~~ 出た。

As soon as Sam said 'Hello!' I left the room.

サムが 今日ほと言った とたんに ジェニーが 部屋を 出た。

さむが こんにちはといった とたんに ジェニーが へやを であた。

As soon as Sam said 'Hello!' Jenny left the room.

The first sentence is actually incorrect because you can control the action of going out of the room. But, the second sentence is correct because you are talking about another person's action and not your own action. This is just the kind of trick that might pop up on the test.

How does this look on the JLPT?

とたんに can sometimes get mixed up with other expressions that mean almost the same thing in English, but are used in different ways. The most common among these are 次第 (しだい), 以来 (いらい) and ついでに. Let's take a look at each of these separately.

とたんに vs. 次第

次第 has an almost identical meaning to とたんに. It can best be translated as 'as soon as' or '~たらずぐに' in Japanese. 次第 is different in that it is considered more formal and it is formed differently than とたんに:

verb stem + 次第

着く → 着きます → 着き~~ます~~ → 着き次第

It also can not be used for things in the past:

先生が 教室を 入り次第、 生徒は 静かに ~~なつた~~。

せんせいが きょうしつを はいりしだい、 せいとは しずかに ~~なつた~~。

As soon as the teacher entered the room, the students became quiet.

This same sentence can be correctly written using とたんに:

先生が 教室を 入つたとたんに、 生徒は 静かに なつた。

せんせいが きょうしつを はいつたとたんに、 せいとは しずかに なつた。

As soon as the teacher entered the room, the students became quiet.

Also, 次第 has more connection to the first clause. The main clause is more dependent on the first clause so it can sometimes be translated as 'depend on'.

とたんに vs. 以来

以来 has a similar meaning 'since' or '~からずっと' in Japanese. It can sometimes be confused with とたんに but again there are some key differences between this grammar point and とたんに. First off it is formed differently:

verb in ~te form + くらい

食べる → 食べて → 食べて以来

It also has the meaning of a period of time and not 'as soon as'. Take a look at the following sentence:

ブートキャンプを 始まって以来、 多い ものを 勉強した。
ブートキャンプを はじまってくらい、 おおい ものを べんきょうした。
Since I started bootcamp, I have studied a lot of things.

This might seem obvious in this sentence, but on the test when you have to select a grammar point from the others it might not be immediately obvious. Look for verb endings before the blank to give you clues as to what will go in the sentence.

とたんに vs. ついでに

There is a pretty clear difference between these two actually, but it is still important to point out. It has more of a meaning of 'while you are at it'. For example,

ついでに 私にも コーヒーを 作って ください。
ついでに わたしにも コーヒーを つくって ください。
While you are at it, please make some coffee for me.

Two actions are still being done at the same time, but the actions are being done at the same time because it takes less time and effort to do both together. Here's another example that should make it a little more clear.

東京へ 来た ついでに 友達を 訪問 した。
とうきょうへ きた ついでに ともだちを ほうもん した。
Since I'm in Tokyo, I visited my friend.

The speaker above was in Tokyo for some reason, possibly business, so she decide to visit her friend because it is easier than making a separate trip to see her friend.

Example Questions

Sentential Questions I

- 1 - 窓を _____ 涼しい風を感じた。
- 1) 開けて以来 2) 開けたとたんに
2) 開け次第 4) 開けり以来
- 2 - 先生が _____、クラスを始める。
- 1) 着いたとたんに 2) 着いて以来
3) 着いたついでに 4) 着き次第
- 3 - スーパに _____、アイスクリームを買った。
- 1) 行き次第 2) 行ったついでに
3) 行って以来 4) 行ったとたんに

Sentential Questions II

- 4 - 私は _____ * _____.
- 1) 彼女だと 2) 見た
3) とたんに 4) 思った
- 5 - 電話を * _____.
- 1) とたんに 2) また電話が
3) 鳴った 4) 切った

1) 2 - 次第 doesn't work because this sentence is in the past. Even if the present tense were used it would sound a bit strange.

2) 4 - We can use 次第 here because the sentence is in present tense. Also, the main clause's action (始める) is dependent upon the first clause.

3) 2 - ついでに is the best answer because the main clause is something under our control and it saves time to get the ice cream while you are there (doing something else).

4) 4 (2 3 1 4)

5) 4 (4 1 2 3)