間・間に・ながら



Three Ways to Say While

Map the time. Identify the actor. Choose the relationship.

A focused guide to ongoing or repeated situations during a period, events within a period, and two actions by the same person. Work from timelines and stated intentions rather than translating the English word 'while' mechanically. Basic plain forms, ている and verb stems are prerequisites. うちに, 最中に and contrastive ながら are outside the main scope.

Post-beginner to early intermediate / approximately N4-N3

32 practice tasks | Explained answers | English guidance

LEARN. PRACTICE. UNDERSTAND.

Your route through this book

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Before you begin

Post-beginner to early intermediate / approximately N4-N3. Levels are approximate teaching guidance, not an official JLPT syllabus or a proficiency guarantee.

Read, try, compare, retry

Read one lesson, study the Japanese examples and English meanings, then complete the matching practice. Write short answers on the lines and longer responses in a notebook. Check the reason as well as the answer. Return to the lesson when you cannot explain your choice.

How to use the answers

Open tasks have model answers, not the only possible wording. Accept natural alternatives that preserve the requested meaning and viewpoint. For each task, check both the answer and your reason. The final practice set is a self-check: try it without notes, then review the categories you missed.

Reading and use

This PDF is designed for zoomed reading and printing. Japanese examples use normal spelling; vocabulary notes support key words. No recorded audio or personal feedback is included. You may keep and use your downloaded files for personal study without a time limit. Printing for your own study is allowed. Sharing, redistribution, and resale are not permitted. © 2026 Junichiro Japanese.

Three different questions

Distinguish a period, an event within it and paired actions.

Start with the relationship

English 'while' can describe several relationships. 間 often presents a situation as continuing or recurring across a reference period. 間に locates an event or achievement within that period. Basic simultaneous ながら connects two actions by the same actor, with the main assertion after ながら.

Use a timeline

Imagine a two-hour train ride. Reading throughout the journey can be drawn as a long band. Finishing one chapter during the ride can be marked as an event inside the band. Listening to music while reading has two overlapping activity bands for the same person. These drawings are thinking tools, not precise measurements required by the grammar.

Do not start with a single English word

First decide whether you are describing what held through the period, what happened within it, or how one person combined activities. A natural translation may use 'during', 'while', 'as' or 'within'.

電車に乗っている間、本を読んでいました。

I was reading while I was on the train.

電車に乗っている間に、一章読み終わりました。

I finished one chapter during the train ride.

音楽を聞きながら、本を読みました。

I read a book while listening to music.

DECISION / Draw the reference period first. Then draw a band, an event inside it, or two same-actor activities.

WORDS / 乗る（のる） ride/board; 一章（いっしょう） one chapter; 読み終わる（よみおわる） finish reading; 音楽（おんがく） music

間: an ongoing or repeated pattern

Describe a situation over a reference period without inventing a no-break rule.

A period-wide view

間, read あいだ here, sets up a stretch of time. The main clause presents a state, continuing action or repeated pattern across that stretch. A sentence about daily practice can use 間 even though the person also sleeps, eats and does other things.

Natural duration is not a stopwatch

ずっと can make continuity explicit, and 毎日 can make repetition explicit. Without such words, the sentence still needs interpretation in context. Reading during a flight does not logically certify that the reader never looked up for a second.

Different actors are possible

The person or thing defining the period need not be the actor in the main clause. A child can sleep while an adult works. This is an important difference from the basic same-actor ながら pattern in this book.

休みの間、毎朝散歩しました。

During the break, I went for a walk every morning.

弟が寝ている間、私は静かに本を読んでいました。

While my younger brother slept, I was quietly reading.

店が開いている間、入口に係の人がいました。

While the shop was open, an attendant was at the entrance.

DECISION / A repeating series of dots spread across the period can represent 間 as well as a solid band.

WORDS / 毎朝（まいあさ） every morning; 散歩（さんぽ） walk; 弟（おとうと） younger brother; 入口（いりぐち） entrance; 係の人（かかりのひと） attendant

Map the time

Review: 01-03. Answer the prompt and give a short reason.

Q001 For a period from 10:00 to 11:00, reading continues across the period. Choose the intended view: 間 or 間に. Explain your timeline.

Q002 A phone rings once at 10:30 during a 10:00-11:00 meeting. Use 間に to complete: 会議の____、一度電話が鳴りました。

Q003 A person practiced piano every morning of a holiday, with normal breaks between sessions. Is 間 possible, or does it require no breaks? Explain.

Q004 A two-hour film is watched during a free four-hour afternoon. Must 間に be rejected because the film is not instantaneous? Explain.

Answers Q001-Q008

Q001 間. Draw a reading band across the reference period.

The task asks for a continuing activity over the period, not a particular completed event within it.

Q002 会議の間に、一度電話が鳴りました。

The single ringing event falls inside the meeting window. 一度 means once; 間に itself does not encode the count.

Q003 間 is possible: it can present a repeated pattern throughout a period.

Daily practice does not occupy every second. The false 'never stop' rule would wrongly exclude ordinary repetition.

Q004 No. The whole film can be an event within the longer time window.

間に does not restrict events to a single instant. The relation is containment within a period.

Q005 夏休みの間、毎日泳ぎました。

A noun such as 夏休み needs の before 間.

Q006 部屋が静かな間に、録音しました。

静か is a na-adjective and takes な before 間. に places the recording within that quiet period.

Q007 バスを待っている間に、友達から電話が来ました。

The ongoing waiting supplies the time window; the call is an event inside it. A non-past time-clause form is compatible with the past main event.

Q008 暖かい間に、散歩しましょう。

An i-adjective connects directly to 間. The proposed walk is to occur within the warm period.

This answer excerpt includes Q005-Q008; those tasks are not shown in this sample.

Keep the distinction

Draw a reference period, then the activity or event inside it.

間 can present a continuing state or repeated pattern, not only uninterrupted motion.

間に locates events within a window; they can take time or occur more than once.

Check the connection: Nの / na-adjective な / i-adjective or verb phrase directly.

Basic simultaneous ながら uses a ます stem and the same actor for both actions.

The final clause of ながら carries the main assertion and tense.

If multiple descriptions fit, explain the viewpoint instead of forcing a unique grammar judgment.

Make it yours

Choose three tasks you found difficult. Change the people, objects or setting, then write a new example that follows the same distinction. Revisit it the next day and explain the choice without looking at the answer.