

# Report writing tasks in Japanese at university: application and student approaches

日本の大学におけるレポート課題 – 課し方と学生の取り組み方 –

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## 要旨

日本の大学で英語教育に携わる外国人の多くは、大学生が取り組んでいる日本語による課題について十分な知識を持っていない。「課題レポート」はそのひとつである。著者は「英語の書き方」と「日本語の書き方」に関する研究、偏見、および経時的変化について言及した。現在日本語で出版されているレポートの書き方に関する文献からのアドバイスについても触れた。さらに、大学生を対象に課題レポートの課し方や学生の取り組み方等を明らかにするために行ったアンケート結果を報告した。対象は4学部の2年生(123人)。アンケート内容は、評価基準の説明はあるか、資料収集は必要とされるか、学生がレポートの書き方について指導を受けたか等。その結果、学生の多くはレポートの返却をされておらず、半数以上は大学で指導を全く受けていなかった。しかし、指導を受けたことのある学生はアメリカの学生と同じように様々なアドバイス(引用する方法、段落の組み立て方等)を受けていたことがわかった。以上のことから、1年生のために日本語によるWriting授業やセミナー、あるいはWriting支援センターの必要性を示した。

## Introduction

A foreign instructor at a Japanese university may have little understanding of the tasks students undertake in Japanese-medium courses. One such task is the Japanese *repooto*, or report. Foreign English instructors may wonder how instructors assign, comment upon, and evaluate these reports. It seems natural that students' experiences writing in their first language (L1) at university may impact their approach towards second language (L2) tasks.

This paper emerged from a desire to develop a deeper understanding of the report task. It begins with a summary of popular notions about Japanese and English expository writing patterns and how these notions have changed. I then present a questionnaire given to university students that attempts to elicit how report tasks are implemented, what advice students have received about writing them, and how students define their own writing style. Implications for English writing instruction will be offered in the conclusion.

## Background

Examining texts written in a second language and attempting to deduce how writers write in their first language is the core of the contrastive rhetoric project, initiated by Kaplan (1966). Hinds (1983) departed from Kaplan's approach by asserting that researchers must focus on texts in writers' L1 rather than L2. He attempted

to show how essays written for the *Tensei Jingo* column of the *Asahi Shimbun* followed a four-part “*ki-shou-ten-ketsu*” pattern, which originated in classical Chinese poetry: in *ki*, the topic is introduced; *shou* develops the topic; *ten* introduces a digression with an indirect connection to the topic; *ketsu* concludes the composition. Hinds asserted that this pattern was often found in Japanese expository prose, and highly evaluated by Japanese readers. However, this pattern may cause interference when a Japanese student writes an essay in English, where a linear organization, with no digressions, is expected. Hinds (1987) went on to contrast English and Japanese expository writing, claiming English to be “writer responsible” (the writer must write in a clear and understandable manner) and Japanese to be “reader responsible” (the reader must be able to fill in missing transitions and grasp a writer’s unstated intentions). Researchers and textbook writers less cautious than Hinds seized upon implications drawn from his findings: Japanese is indirect, illogical, and digressive; English is direct, logical and linear.

During the 1990s, however, Japanese composition manuals (e.g., Egawa, 1997 ; Kinoshita, 1994), began giving advice modeled after manuals printed in North America: easy-to-understand writing was stressed, and *ki-shou-ten-ketsu* was condemned as unfit for academic writing. On the research front, Kubota (1997) asserted that Hinds’ description of *ki-shou-ten-ketsu* as a pattern common to expository prose was an overgeneralization. The *Tensei Jingo* column allows readers to comment on news items, and cannot be compared with expository writing. Cahill (2003), having researched the history of *ki-shou-ten-ketsu* in Chinese and Japanese, states that historically *ten* has served not as a digression but rather as a means of amplifying a topic. (The Japanese *Wikipedia* site also defines *ten* as the *kaku*, or core, of an essay, and a website giving advice about writing claims that *ten* is useful for introducing counterarguments). Moreover, Kubota and Lehner (2004) argue that research in contrastive rhetoric has overemphasized interference from L1 rhetorical patterns, when a host of other variables are involved, such as L1 writing expertise and L2 proficiency.

Hirose (2003) notes that writing instruction in Japan greatly differs from that in North America. Whereas students at American high schools and universities receive intensive expository writing instruction, no unified instruction takes place at any stage in Japanese education. In elementary and secondary schools students mostly write *kansoubun* (personal impression essays) based on readings, and engage in journal writing. However, many universities and companies now require students to write *shou-ronbun* (short argumentative essays) on their entrance exams. Kobayashi and Rinnert (2002) assert that many students receive intensive writing instruction from their high school teachers in special after-school lessons, to prepare students for particular entrance exams that they will take; a student’s experience with writing may therefore depend on the entrance exams that he or she has prepared for, and universities and departments vary in their inclusion of *shou-ronbun* tests.

As a result, English writing instructors at Japanese universities may have little idea how students approach writing in Japanese. Furthermore, substantial research centering on short essay or *shou-ronbun* writing exists, but less has been written about the university report. A brief description of this task, as presented in Japanese manuals, follows in the next section.

## What is a report?

Kinoshita (1994) defines a report as a form of writing that presents information about research or surveys (p. 9). The primary difference between a report and a *ronbun* (argumentative paper) is the projected number of readers; reports are usually written for one reader (the teacher or manager) while *ronbun* may have a wider audience. Kinoshita also distinguishes reports from *sakubun* (expressive essays) in that the writer's opinions must be grounded in evidence, and subjective impressions are impermissible (p. 10). Egawa (1997) also defines reports as papers intended to present information to an audience of one (p. 25). Satou *et. al* (2006), however, claim that students should not write reports simply with one reader, namely the teacher, in mind; rather, reports should be accessible to all people possessing the same amount of knowledge as the writer's classmates (p. 134).

Yoshida (2006) likens the Japanese report to the American "term paper" (p. 11). He distinguishes between two forms of reports that require greatly different approaches: reports written in humanities courses, centering primarily on social topics, and scientific reports, which present the results of experiments (his book focuses on the former). Yoshida proceeds with advice similar to that found in North American writing manuals: writers should narrow their themes as much as possible; outside research is required, but blatant copying of sources is to be avoided; and the report should be written in *wakariyasui* (easy to understand) language. In all manuals the use of *ki-shou-ten-ketsu* is disdained, and variations of *joron-honron-ketsuron*, or an introduction-body-conclusion format, are recommended. Takaya (2007, p.44-45) even illustrates how a paper written in the *ki-shou-ten-ketsu* style will produce an unsatisfactory essay (though he also shows how *ki-shou-ten-ketsu* can be used effectively).

## Methods

### 1. Questionnaire

In order to learn more about students' experiences writing reports in Japanese at university, a questionnaire in Japanese was drafted and distributed to 123 second-year students at Kagawa University. These students were enrolled in English courses, and questionnaires were distributed and filled in at the beginning of class. One class (59 students) consisted of non-English majors in the Faculty of Education; the second consisted of 41 students in the School of Medicine, majoring in Medicine; the third comprised 23 students in the Faculties of Law, Economics, and Education. It was felt that the questionnaire should be in Japanese, and students should respond in Japanese, since students would be less restricted in their responses. It was also thought that second year students, in their first semester, would be ideal targets. They had completed a full year of Liberal Arts courses, and would have written many reports, many with no particular connection to their majors.

It was hoped that general knowledge about report writing would be elicited to generate information for a more focused study. The questionnaire developed from three research questions:

1. How are report tasks implemented?
2. Do students generally receive writing instruction and feedback?
3. Which organizational patterns do students prefer?





Figure 1

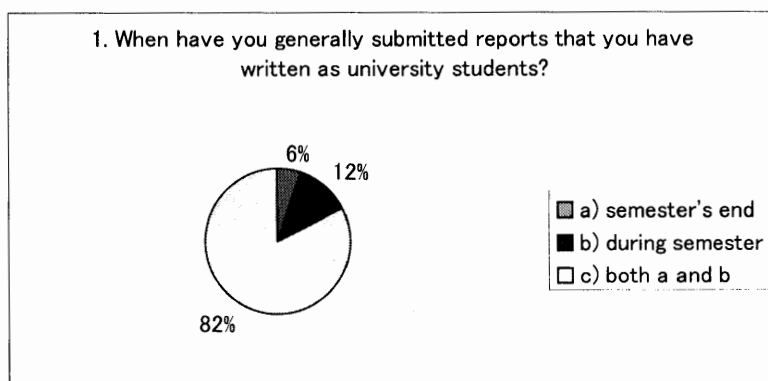


Figure 2

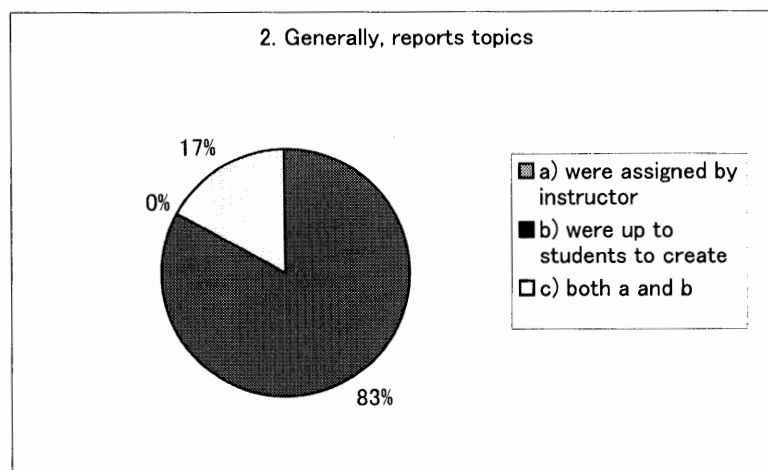


Figure 3

3. Were criteria for evaluating reports made clear at the time reports were assigned?							
1 (yes)	2	3	4	5 (no)	No response	Total	Mean
5	21	46	29	21	1	122	3.33
4. Was outside research required in writing these reports?							
1 (yes)	2	3	4	5 (no)	No response	Total	Mean
26	38	49	8	2	0	123	2.37
(Answer 6 and 7 if reports were returned.)							
6. Did instructors provide feedback?							
1 (yes)	2	3	4	5 (no)	No response	Total	Mean
9	9	14	19	0	72	51	2.84
7. Were grades clearly justified or explained?							
1 (yes)	2	3	4	5 (no)	No response	Total	Mean
7	3	5	20	16	72	51	3.69
(Answer 8 if reports were not returned.)							
8. Do you attempt to contact your instructors to receive/discuss your graded reports?							
1 (yes)	2	3	4	5 (no)	No response	Total	Mean
0	1	1	11	84	26	97	4.84

For question 3, regarding whether criteria for evaluation are made clear when reports are assigned, the majority of students gave neutral or negative responses. Responses for Question 4 indicate that outside research is usually required. Only 51 students, less than half of the total, responded to Questions 6 and 7, concerning feedback. Responses suggest that students do receive some feedback, though a mean of 2.84 indicates that this is not always the case. For question 7, regarding whether grades are justified or explained, over half (36 students) responded negatively. Perhaps most striking is the result for Question 8. Of the 94 students who responded, 84 indicated that they do not attempt to contact their instructors to receive or discuss their reports. If reports are collected in the last class of the semester, and students never visit their instructors' offices to discuss or receive their reports, then many instructors are unable to give feedback to students, even if they would like to do so.

The two open-response questions generated a variety of responses. For Question 9, about writing instruction/advice received at university, responses touched on such aspects of the writing process as prewriting, note-taking, paragraph development, rhetorical organization, clarity (for instance, short, simple sentences are best), format, citing sources and writing reference lists, register, character usage, and plagiarism (see Appendix for the complete responses). Two areas not mentioned were content revision and narrowing down one's topic. However, since 83% of students reported that report topics were always assigned by instructors, the absence of this aspect of writing instruction should not be surprising.

More striking was the fact that 66 students, or 53.6% of the 123 students who responded to this questionnaire, reported having had received no instruction whatsoever at university. Several more wrote that they had received almost none, or had been advised to buy a report writing manual. A few students expressed frustration at this lack of writing instruction, and claimed that formal instruction should be implemented in the future.

Question 10 asked students about their writing style, especially in terms of rhetorical organization. In line with the advice found in composition manuals, the majority of respondents (24) gave *joron-honron-ketsuron*, or variations of this format, as their format of choice. However, 13 claimed to organize their reports according to *ki-shou-ten-ketsu*, which violates the advice offered in manuals. Other noteworthy responses are listed below.

#### Organizational Pattern

#### Approximate translation

1. 問題提示・解決方法・意見・まとめ	problem-method of solution-opinion-conclusion
2. 題名・結論・理由・具体例・結論	title-conclusion-reason-example-conclusion
3. 問題提起・本論・反論・結論	problem-body-counterargument-conclusion
4. 導入・本論・結論	introduction-body-conclusion
5. 題名・目的・実験方法・結果・考察	title-objective-methods-results-discussion
6. 本論・起・承・転・結・結論	intro.-intro.-development-turn-conclusion-conclusion
7. 結論・本論・結論	conclusion-body-conclusion

(1) and (2) seem representative of organizational patterns offered in composition manuals, though interestingly the writer's opinion in (1) is kept separate from the conclusion or summary. The structure of (3) could perhaps be likened to *ki-shou-ten-ketsu*, with the counterargument functioning as *ten*. (4) is nearly identical to *joron-honron-ketsuron*, though *dounyuu* (導入) implies that the topic or theme has been imported. (5) can be recognized as a standard means of organizing scientific papers. It is unclear how (6), a fusion of *joron-honron-ketsuron* and *ki-shou-ten-ketsu*, would appear in form, with its apparently double introductions and conclusions. Finally, (7) may most resemble the North American introduction-body-conclusion format; the thesis (conclusion) is stated up front and repeated at the end, as is prescribed in most English academic writing textbooks (some scholars, such as Emig, 1971, have accused this pattern of being redundant). Several other students also wrote that the conclusion should be stated at the beginning and repeated at the end.

These findings, though limited, seem to confirm a "bottom heavy" nature of Japanese expository prose, with the conclusion weighing more than the introduction (Hirose, 2003). However, one student wrote that this conclusion must be *danteiteki* (conclusive), which Hinds (1983) said that it need not be. Overall, it appears that reports written by many students in Japanese share similarities with English papers, though an analysis of actual student reports in both English and Japanese would be needed before conclusions can be drawn.

Finally, several students claimed not to have any particular method of organizing reports, or that the report's form must follow the needs of the topic (for example, reports on social topics must differ structurally from reports describing experiments). Some comments also revealed attitudes towards the report task itself: one claimed that for "unimportant reports" he/she just wrote whatever came to mind (*daradara to kaku*). According to another, "for Liberal Arts courses at Japanese universities all one has to do is turn in a report to get credit, so few teachers provide writing instruction, and few students care about this."

## Discussion

Before discussing the results, a few problems found with this questionnaire after data was collected should be mentioned. An instructor who distributed this questionnaire in one class reported that students were confused by the wording in Question 1 ("When have you generally submitted reports that you have written as university students?") Reports submitted at the end of the semester may have been assigned several weeks earlier, and therefore may not be considered final reports; several reports submitted in a portfolio format would be hard to place either in the "semester's end" or "during the semester" categories. Also, it was found that some students were confused by the meaning of "writing style" in Question 10. It was hoped that the following question, "Do you use a particular writing pattern?", would explain the meaning of this word. Perhaps it would have been best to avoid the ambiguous word "style" all together. This survey also made no attempt to distinguish between humanities and scientific report writing, two different genres that perhaps cannot be treated together.

This study, focusing on a limited number of students at one national university, was too small in scope to allow for conclusions to be made about how report tasks are applied and how students write reports. Nonetheless, the following can be said at least about this group of students (drawing largely from their first-year experiences in Liberal Arts courses):



1. Reports are not written only at semester's end;
2. Topics are usually assigned by instructors;
3. In over half of all cases, reports are not returned;
4. Some evaluation criteria are given when reports are assigned (but often not);
5. Outside research is often required;
6. Students sometimes receive feedback, but not always;
7. Grades are largely unjustified;
8. Students do not attempt to retrieve their reports;
9. Advice about writing is generally not given;
10. Students incorporate a variety of writing patterns (including *ki-shou-ten-ketsu*).

What implications can be drawn about how students' report writing experience in Japanese will affect how they approach English writing tasks? It perhaps can be said that the explicit writing instruction commonly given in university English classes will be a first to many students. Assignments where students can create their own topics may also be a first, which may explain the difficulty students have in deciding upon a topic. Students may also be unaccustomed to such staples of the "process" approach as content feedback and revision; students may not see the purpose of rewriting their papers and therefore may put little effort in revising them. Students also are accustomed to doing research for their Japanese reports, and personal, non text-based writing assignments in English classes may seem trivial. (However, students receive little research training in high school (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002), which suggests that they are unready for the research demands required of them in university).

English writing instructors should also recognize that students utilize a number of writing patterns other than *ki-shou-ten-ketsu*, and that they will likely approach writing tasks with the same flexibility demanded of university students in North America. Many students also know that plagiarism is a violation of academic ethics, though instructors need to provide clear definitions of plagiarism as well as explain its severe consequences in a North American setting. Until recently, plagiarism was not officially recognized as cheating at Kagawa University, but this has changed. Students caught plagiarizing their final reports may now be denied credit for a course. It is hoped that this move will help reduce the number of cut-and-paste essays submitted in English writing classes each semester.

## Further questions

One question that arises from this paper is whether first year students may need formal writing instruction in Japanese. Certainly a number of students feel this need. Most university students in North America are required to take a composition course during their freshmen year, to prepare them for the writing and research demands of university. North American universities also typically have a "writing center," where students who need extra help can receive guidance from writing instructors and peer tutors. As Amano (2004, p. 69-70) asserts, as universities in Japan relax admission standards due to the decreasing number of applicants, students'

basic academic skills will continue to decline. Supplementary or remedial education is essential to prevent students from becoming overwhelmed and dropping out. Report writing is one area where students will need extra help.

One problem, however, is the faculty's attitudes towards writing. Rinnert and Kobayashi (2004) found that many faculty members at their universities reported not taking report writing very seriously; more important to them was helping students with their graduation theses. Attempts to incorporate writing courses, seminars, or workshops into university curricula should therefore be made known to all faculty members, particularly those who include writing in their syllabuses.

Native English-speaking instructors, who have received formal writing training or have taught writing courses to Japanese students, can help in the designing of such writing courses or writing/resource centers. Writing is one of the most important skills students should gain in university, and Japanese and foreign faculty can work together to ensure that students receive formal training that meets today's global standard.

## Acknowledgments

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## Appendix: Responses to Question 9 (in Japanese)

### 1. 2<sup>nd</sup>-year Medical (Medicine) majors

- ・自分なりの考えや、考察をレポート中に入れる
- ・具体例を書く
- ・表やグラフ [グラフ] を入れたほうが良い。
- ・表紙を付ける。名前や番号、タイトルなどをどんなふうにかくか。何を (原因、結果、考察など) 書くか。
- ・考察とはどういうものか。理論値と測定値との違いをどうみるか。
- ・考察は誤差を述べても、意味はない (物理)。
- ・物理の実験のレポートでは研究のレポート手技らしきものをアドバイスされました。
- ・理科系教科は詳しく習った。表紙をつける 目的を明らかにする 手順、結果、考察を書く。など。
- ・表紙を付ける、目的 理論 実験方法 実験結果 考察 感想 参照、という流れで書く (自然実習について)
- ・実験のレポートの書き方についてはアドバイスを受けた。何を書いていくか、考察の書き方。
- ・一番大切なのは考察である (感想ではない)。
- ・実験のレポートでは、目的・方法・結果・考察を書く。
- ・『実験のレポートの場合、実験の目的、理論、方法、結果、考察の順に書くように』とは教わりました。ただ、あまり詳しくは教わっていません。
- ・大学では、特に教わっていない。各講師によって、フォーマットが知らされるだけ。
- ・自分の意見を述べるレポートの書き方について余り指導を受けなかった。実験の後に書くレポートの書き方についてはある程度アドバイスをもらった。考察は客観的な意見を書いたり、比較したりするなどのアドバイスを受けた。
- ・意見を述べるレポートの場合は、特に指導は無かったと思う。実験等のレポートでは、目的、原理、実験方法等の項目を明確に記載するよう指導を受けた。

- ・指導やアドバイスは、主に実験レポートの書き方であった。一般的なレポートについての指導はほとんどなかった。
- ・受けていません。(X 2)
- ・受けていない (X 4)
- ・とくに受けていない
- ・受けた記憶がない。
- ・受けてない。(X 3)
- ・受けなかった (X 2)
- ・あまり。
- ・特に...
- ・特に受けてない
- ・特に受けてない。そのようなアドバイスは今後なるべきだ。
- ・特になし
- ・なし (X 2)
- ・いいえ
- ・いいえ (NO!)
- ・指導もアドバイスも全くありませんでした。
- ・回答なし：1

## 2. 2<sup>nd</sup> year Education majors

- ・段落に分けること、意見に一貫性をもたせる。
- ・心研（研究室）のレポートは詳しい書き方の指導を。レジュメを使って詳しく教えてくれた。
- ・パラグラフをつくって書く。 指定されたページ数・文字数・行数を守る。 参考図書の書き方。
- ・名前の書く場所、題名のつけ方、用紙、最低行数。
- ・いきなり書きはじめず、まず書くことをまとめるためメモを作る。
- ・書き方、見やすい形成、文章表現について。
- ・構成について
- ・形成について。テーマ、キーワード、要約、本文、まとめ、考察、参考文献、etc.
- ・参考文献の書き方。自分の主張を出したほうがいい(調べた資料を証として)。
- ・文字の大きさ 表記のしかた ex)「子供」(X) → 「子ども」(O)
- ・先生が授業中に説明していたことをレポートに書くときには、「このことが大切だ」ともう一度要点を言ってくれました。 自分の考えを書くときには、しっかりと書いて、参考にした文献があれば、きちんと本の名前を書くことです。
- ・授業によって違うけど、ある授業では「レポートの書き方」というプリントをもらった 構成など、こう書いたらいいと書かれてあった
- ・自分勝手な意見は書かないように。
- ・一番伝えたいコトを最初と最後にもってくる!!! 強調を大切にする。
- ・心理学のレポートにおいて... レポートは感想文じゃないので自分の考えを述べる時事実に基づ

づいた根拠のあるものでなければならない。読む人に「なんでそういう考えになったの?」と思わせてやいけない。

- ・理科系レポートの場合、結果は過去形で、考察は現在形で書くこと。
- ・1年のころ少し指導の授業があった。論理立てて書く事、というのを言われた気がする。
- ・レポートの書き方に間する授業があった。(90分)。また、要点を言ってくれる先生もいた。
- ・あまり具体的なアドバイスはもらっていないが、参考文献等の引用仕方は指導を受けた。
- ・引用する時は資料の名前・作者名・出版社名・出版名を書くこと。
- ・引用部分は明記すること。
- ・ほとんど受けていないけれど、教科によっては注意点があった。
- ・具体的にどのように書けばよいかは、教えてもらわなかったように思います。
- ・ほとんど受けた記憶がない。
- ・あまり受けた記憶がない
- ・アドバイスを受けてない
- ・受けていません。(X 5)
- ・受けてません (X 2)
- ・受けてない
- ・受けていない。(X 3)
- ・受けていない。教えてほしい。
- ・受けてないです。(X 2)
- ・受けませんでした。
- ・特に受けていないです。
- ・特に受けていない
- ・全く受けていない ; \_ ;
- ・受けたことはありません。
- ・受けたことがない。
- ・うけてないです。
- ・くれなかった。
- ・あまりない。
- ・ありませんでした。
- ・ありません
- ・とくになし
- ・とくにない。
- ・回答なし: 6

### 3. 2<sup>nd</sup> year Law, Economics, and Education majors

- ・学部のゼミで受けた。法学部の学部開設科目のレポートの書方。
- ・参考文献は必ず書くこと。(著書は『』 論文は「」等)
- ・できるだけ短い文で書く。結論から書く。
- ・資料からの丸写しはしないこと。何がしたいのか、意見をはっきり述べること。

- ・「レポートの書き方」という本を買ってくださいといわれた。でもまだ読んでいません。
- ・授業でレポートの書き方というのをやり、本も指定されたものを購入した。しかし、正直身についていない気がする。
- ・「レポートの書き方」という本を読んだ。第三者の意見を含め、参考文献をのせる。
- ・指導は受けなかった。参考書の解説はあった。
- ・指導などは受けなかった。
- ・受けていない (X 4)
- ・受けていません (X 2)
- ・うけていない。自己流でやっている。
- ・受けませんでした。
- ・ありませんでした。
- ・特に具体的な指導はもらっていない
- ・回答なし：4