

# Cramming for exams on cell phones

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Cramming for exams is never fun, but it's a fact of life for students everywhere, especially in Japan. But forget using flash cards or using a textbook to learn all the needed information. Mobile-phone companies are now getting into the game and allowing people to go online and test their knowledge on the go.

This summer KDDI, one of the country's biggest wireless carriers, launched a service under its AU label to offer the "Manabi" program. Literally meaning "to study," Manabi allows subscribers to get access to study kits and test themselves on multiple-choice questions that flash on-screen.

While the most obvious way to use the program is to cram for major academic tests such as school entrance exams, the range of tests available is far broader than the obvious. Cell-phone users can use their handsets to learn English idioms and hone their language skills, or they can use them to become better at Japanese proverbs or just to bolster their vocabulary in their native language.

Indeed, the company launched the program by encouraging users to take the national university entrance exam for free until the end of September and get scored on how they do on Japan's equivalent for the SATs that high school students must take in order to get into university.

Moreover, by joining forces with some of the country's biggest textbook companies, including Shueisha and Nichinoken, the number of study programs KDDI offers continues to increase daily. The company even

has a line geared for mothers of preschool children who are preparing for entrance exams into some of the country's most exclusive and competitive elementary schools, so the mothers can read out questions to their children and make sure they are being fed the right answers on the go.

KDDI pointed out that its service not only allows users to get access to information but also test their own knowledge and see how they fare on the go. In a major city like Tokyo, where most commuters take the train and many have long rides, such a service can be particularly attractive.

"I think it's great. I know where my weaknesses are, so I can get out my cell phone and test my reading skills when I'm going home" by train, said Midori Kashiwagi, a high school student who will be taking her university entrance exams in February. She pointed out that right now, according to the cell-phone program, she's a borderline candidate for her school of first choice, "but I think that if I keep studying and concentrate most on what I might get wrong, I can get in where I really want to go."

Kashiwagi added that during rush hour it can get awkward lugging out a big textbook and flipping pages, so using a small phone in one hand is more efficient in the confined space. In addition, she said that being able to get questions randomly and ending with a final score each time she logs on to her phone makes the learning process "more enjoyable, insofar as leaning for an exam can be enjoyable."

Others, however, were less enamored by the phone learning process.

"If I did that every day, it would cost a lot ... and I think money would be better spent buying another textbook and learning ideas as much as just cramming in facts," said Masaaki Seki, a high school sophomore. "To me right now, it seems like a waste of money, and I'm more confident about what exam questions might be coming up than a phone company,"

he added.

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