はい

Hai!

A Japanese word that most students soon learn, but usually fail to pronounce correctly, is the affirmative *hai*, meaning "yes, that is correct; I agree; I will do so." The problem is that most Americans pronounce it like the English words "high" or "hi," in which the ending vowel sound tapers off or is prolonged somewhat. This mispronunciation is most common in the children's classes, where they can be heard enthusiastically shouting "Hiiiiiiii!" Vowel duration is a critical part of Japanese pronunciation, and the vowel sound in *hai* is quite brief and truncated, ending quickly in what amounts to a glottal stop, like a hiccup. (try saying the word "height" but without actually enunciating the "t.") Just remember to keep it short, with a sharp cut-off.

The word for "no" is rarely used in the martial arts. This is probably because senseis, like drill instructors, tend to demand a positive answer to every question (such as "Are you ready for more?" and "Are we going to win?" etc.). I suspect that many senseis don't even want their students to *know* the word for "no," just as they'd prefer to eradicate the words "I can't" from everyone's vocabularies. Nevertheless, in the interests of full disclosure: the word for "no" is *Iie* (pronounced "ee-eh"). Be careful how you use it.

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