

Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies

Course Syllabus Template

1. Introductory information about the course and about the instructor:

Course Title: Interview Project Course: Combining your own interests and Japanese learning

Term taught: Fall of 2025

Course format: Discussion and hands-on activity based learning/Independent Study

Targeted Japanese level: Intermediate-High to Advanced level (equivalent to KCJS Third-year High and Fourth-year Japanese classes)

Prerequisites: Students must obtain instructor's permission to take this course

Number of points of the course: 4 credit

Class days/time: Wednesdays from 1:10-4:25 (with small breaks)

Classroom location: Fusokan

Instructor name: Itsuko Nakamura

Email & Telephone: in2008@columbia.edu/ 251-4996

Office location: Fusokan F203

Days/times of weekly office hours: By appointment

2. A description of the course

Is there anyone you want to interview out of curiosity or for your research? Is there anything you want to learn firsthand? This project-based Japanese course is an opportunity for you to go beyond the textbook and classroom and to explore your own interests in any subject by interviewing Japanese experts of your choice *in* Japanese and sharing your findings through an interview article and presentations *in* Japanese.

This course enables you to combine your passions and Japanese learning. You will improve your Japanese proficiency by researching, creating, presenting and communicating *in* Japanese. In the process, you will learn strategies and skills necessary for interview and writing an interview article (see #3 for details). Also, this is the chance to develop your own 'voice' in Japanese and open up a window to connect with Kyoto and people outside your immediate community who share similar interests.

Your interview project should be a unique endeavor - a deep dive into a specific area or topic that you are passionate about. The final result should be an article that could only have been written by you, and could only be written here in Kyoto. To that end, you will use the first third of the semester to narrow down interview questions through a cyclical process of research, presentation and reflection based on feedback you receive from your classmates and Japanese students. This process will also help you build knowledge and vocabulary which is indispensable for a successful interview.

Keigo review and several rounds of practice interviews will help you be prepared for the actual interview.

The writing process emphasizes revising and improving the article through interaction with your classmates and Japanese students. Towards the end of the semester, you will lead a reading and discussion session using your article as an assigned text. The final draft of your article will be published in paper and web formats.

Past interviewees include: Japanese to English/English to Japanese translators, craftsperson of various fields, a set designer for theater production, *wagashi* chef (Japanese sweets), scholars, a novelist, a DJ, a museum curator, a *shamisen* musician (Japanese banjo), a Doshisha University administrator, a Zen monk, an architect, a KCJS alumnus, a soccer player, etc. You will receive help to find potential interviewees. For the past articles, please go to <https://kcjsprofessional.wordpress.com/>

3. A list or description of the student learning outcomes

The course aims to provide an opportunity for students to:

- Improve proficiency in critical language skills through research, presentations and oral and written communication in Japanese
- Improve interpersonal communications in Japanese (including *keigo*)
- Gain deeper insights into a unique culture of the field of your interests
- Learn how to write an interview proposal and formal emails and an engaging, organized and descriptive interview article in Japanese
- Learn how to conduct a successful interview in Japanese (e.g. how to start, carry out and end the session; how to ask relevant follow-up questions to deepen the topic; how to confirm what the interviewee said on the spot)
- Foster autonomous learning skills and become familiar with on-line resources that are useful for self-directed language learning
- Foster their ability to present in both written and oral format in Japanese.

These skills are as follows:

- (Reading) Inferring the meaning of unfamiliar grammar and vocabulary through context
Scanning Japanese texts and pulling out key points and information
When confronted with unfamiliar kanji vocabulary, being able to infer its meaning from its component pieces
- (Listening/Speaking) Asking for clarification when something is unclear, making sure that you understand what your conversation partner has said, and using inference to complement your interpretations
- (Writing/Speaking) Explaining and describing key points in detail
Constructing persuasive arguments to explain your thoughts
- (Writing) Summarizing information in easy to understand constructions and by so doing writing a clear piece that communicates its contents well

Students will be able to use all of these skills to deepen their knowledge and understanding of Japanese.

4. A list of required and recommended texts

No textbook required. All materials will be provided by the instructor. You are expected to conduct research about the subject on-line, read articles/books, and watch videos in Japanese. You may use English resources as well but you should be able to explain the content in Japanese.

5. The requirements for the course

1. Preparation and Participation (35%)

- Attend every class having fully prepared so that you can actively participate in in-class activities
- Actively engage in pair, group and whole-class interaction and facilitate learning from each other
- Give in-class oral progress report of about 3 to 5 minutes regularly
- Give 10- to 30-minute presentation at different stages of the project (e.g. interview theme, interview questions, research findings, outline of your interview article, etc)
- Engage in peer feedback

2. Homework assignments (10%)

- Submit worksheets related to in-class activities
- Submit worksheets which walk you through the interview project
- Keep research logs
- Write email drafts and send emails

3. Research (15%)

- Conduct preliminary research about the subject in Japanese (e.g. read materials on-line/article/book, watch video, etc) outside the class and keep a log updating what you learned in Japanese/English regularly during the research phase
- Build vocabulary
- Narrow down interview objectives and interview questions

4. **Conduct interview (10%)**

- Contact the interviewee and make an appointment
- Conduct an interview at least for one hour (audio-recorded)
- Take pictures and/or ask for photos
- Listen to the audio-recording and ask the interviewee for additional information if necessary

5. **Write, Peer Comment, Revise and Present (30%)**

- Write an engaging, organized and detailed interview article
- Submit the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and final drafts
- Help each other improve the article throughout the revising process
- Receive feedback from Japanese students to improve the article
- Have your interviewee check your final draft and ask for approval to publish it
- Submit your article (approx. 3000 to 4000 words; 5 to 6 pages) including some pictures with captions
- As a final presentation, lead a 60-minute class to read and discuss your article

NOTE: Clear guidelines regarding my expectations will be provided in class. Evaluative feedback will be given throughout the semester. Students will have the opportunity to seek assistance and improve their performance in class and assignments if necessary.

Grading Scale:

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|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 100 – 94.0 A | 86.9 – 83.0 B | 76.9 – 73.0 C | 66.9 – 63.0 D |
| 93.9 – 90.0A- | 82.9 – 80.0 B- | 72.9 – 70.0 C- | 62.9 – 60.0 D- |
| 89.9 – 87.0B+ | 79.7 – 77.0 C+ | 69.9 – 67.0 D+ | 59.9 – F |

6. **Schedule of the semester (subject to change)**

NOTE: A detailed semester schedule will be provided to prospective students when the schedule of Fall 2025 is fixed.

| week | Project phase | In-class activities | On your own | To submit |
|------|---------------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Orientation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Get to know each other- Understand the project objectives, schedule and tasks- Brainstorm ideas about potential interviewees/theme- Learn how to use on-line learning resources for self-directed language learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Read interview articles of the students in the past- Decide your interviewee/theme | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Your potential interviewees/theme |

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|---|--|---|---|--|
| 2 | Interview Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give a presentation about your interview theme/interviewee - Learn how to write an interview proposal and email to make a polite request - Learn interview skills (e.g. how to start/end an interview; how to ask relevant follow-up questions to deepen the topic; how to confirm what the interviewee said on the spot; verbal/non-verbal ways to ask questions, etc) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin research - Build vocabulary - Write an email requesting an interview - Set up an appointment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research log - Your interviewee/theme |
| 3 | Interview Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give an oral progress report - Learn interview skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue with research - Build vocabulary - Narrow down interview objectives and questions - Write an email requesting an interview - Set up an appointment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research log - Draft of an email and interview proposal |
| 4 | Interview Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give an oral progress report - Give a presentation about your interview questions - Review <i>keigo</i> - Practice interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue with research - Build vocabulary - Narrow down interview objectives and questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research log - Potential interview questions |
| 5 | Interview Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give an oral progress report - Review <i>keigo</i> - Practice interviews - Share your reflections on interview practice rounds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue with research - Build vocabulary - Narrow down interview objectives and questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research log |
| 6 | Interview Preparation & preparation to write | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give an oral progress report - Learn how to write a thank-you email - Learn how to write an outline of the article | - | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research log - Finalized interview questions |
| 7 | Conduct an interview & write an outline of the article (no class) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct an interview - Take pictures and/or ask for photos - Send a thank-you email - Listen to the audio-recording and decide what your article will focus on - Take notes/transcribe what you want to quote | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank-you email draft - outline |

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|----|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| 8 | Preparation to write | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Present the outline of your article <p>Learn how to write an engaging, organized and descriptive interview article</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share the outline of the article with Japanese students and have them give you feedback - Listen to the interview and take notes/transcribe parts you want to quote - Contact interviewee for additional information if necessary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st draft |
| 9 | Editing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer comment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read one of your classmates' drafts and give feedback - Have Japanese students read your draft and give you feedback <p>Improve your article based on feedback</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2nd draft |
| 10 | Fall break (no class) | | | |
| 11 | Editing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer comment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contact interviewee for additional information if necessary - Read another classmate's draft and give feedback - Improve your article based on feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3rd draft - draft of Email |
| 12 | Editing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One-on-one session with the instructor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve your article based on feedback | |
| 13 | Editing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final touch to your article - Learn how to write an email request to check the article | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve your article based on feedback - Have your interviewee check the article and ask for approval to publish it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final draft - Request email |
| 14 | Student-led class | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead a reading/discussion session using your article | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read your classmate's article - Send a thank-you note to your interviewee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank-you note draft |

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|----|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 15 | Student-led class & wrap-up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead a reading/discussion session using your article - Share thoughts about what you have learned - Share strategies and resources for self-directed language learning | - Read your classmate's article | - Self-reflection and assessment |
|----|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|

7. Course Policies

General

1. If you are a student with a disability and have a Disability Services-certified 'Accommodation Letter' from your home institution, please send me this letter before the first day of class to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation and do not have an accommodations letter, you should contact the Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement at Columbia University (uge@columbia.edu).
2. Students are expected to abide by the "Terms of Participation" they signed during the admissions process for KCJS, as well as the code of Academic Conduct outlined in Columbia University's General Handbook and your KCJS Handbook.
(<http://www.college.columbia.edu/ccschonorcode>)

As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated.

3. The use of ChatGPT or any other AI tools for course assignments (with the exception of artificial neural networks like DeepL for machine translations, duly cited) is tantamount to plagiarism. Any cases of plagiarism or cheating will be reported to Columbia Undergraduate Global Engagement and the academic advisor at your home institution and are subject to the code of academic conduct there. In such cases, your final grade will be determined by your home institution and not by KCJS.

Preparation/Participation

1. You are expected to attend every class and to actively participate in in-class activities/interaction with classmates, which will be evaluated as "Class Participation".

10 points - You came to class fully prepared and on time
 - You actively participated in class

9-1 points - Your preparation was not sufficient
 - Your participation was not sufficient
 - You were late and/or you left early

0 point - You were absent without legitimate reason

2. Please contact the instructor BEFORE planned absences or RIGHT AFTER illnesses. No make-up classes will be given.

Homework

1. All assignments must be handed in on time, i.e. at the beginning of the class unless instructed otherwise.
2. 10% point reduction per day for late submission unless you have a legitimate reason.
3. No homework handed in beyond two days late will be counted unless you have a legitimate reason. Consult your instructor to submit outstanding homework assigned during your absence.
4. If it is discovered that a student has done any action against the Columbia University's Honor Code, they will be penalized accordingly. <http://www.college.columbia.edu/ccschonorcode>