

## GERMAN UN2520 | Intermediate Conversation

Dr. Xuxu Song, [xs2551@columbia.edu](mailto:xs2551@columbia.edu)  
Spring 2026, Location: TBA  
MW 1:10pm-2:25pm  
Office Hours: By appointment, 404A Hamilton Hall

### GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Come ready to speak lots of German! Students enrolling in Intermediate Conversation should have completed the equivalent of two semesters of college-level German or have placed at the Intermediate level at Columbia. This conversation group is designed for students who are currently taking Intermediate German I or II and would like additional speaking practice, as well as for students who wish to maintain and further develop their spoken German.

The course aims to improve students' ability to speak, understand, and navigate real-world situations in German; to provide ample opportunities to participate in conversations on a variety of topics; to strengthen listening comprehension of German spoken at a natural conversational speed; and to expand both active and passive vocabulary and speaking skills. This is a 2-point course and does not count towards the language requirement.

An electronic version of this syllabus will be available under: <https://germanic.columbia.edu>  
Registration information: Columbia Bulletin, Vergil, or the Barnard Registrar.

### RECOMMENDED MATERIALS:

Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch: Deutsch als Fremdsprache.

### COURSE STRUCTURE & SEMESTER PLAN

Class sessions are interactive and conversation-centered, with a strong emphasis on sustained use of spoken German. In each class, we work with a mix of activities that help you practice everyday communication while also engaging with culturally, historically, and socially relevant topics from the German-speaking world. Course content is largely shaped by student interests; therefore, there is no fixed weekly plan, and the focus of each unit may vary. Together, we decide which topics to explore, and the course plan develops collaboratively over time. Topics covered and learning outcomes are documented throughout the semester in a retroactive weekly plan, allowing us to reflect on our progress and accomplishments by the end of the course.

Examples of topics include:

- Deutschland, Österreich, die Schweiz, und Liechtenstein— gestern und heute
- Das Leben in deutschsprachigen Ländern (Reisen, Essen, Umgangssprache usw.)
- Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Länder (z.B. die Wiedervereinigung)
- Deutschsprachige Nachrichten
- Musik, Kultur, Literatur, Politik, Kunst
- Gesellschaftliche Themen: Recht, soziale Fragen, Umweltschutz, Migration usw.
- Deutschsprachiger Film
- Grammatik-Wiederholung

Class sessions typically include a mix of activities such as:

- Daily warm-ups focused on everyday communication and community building
- Vocabulary practice through collaborative vocabulary lists and games
- Paired or small-group conversations and interviews on a variety of topics
- Dialogs and role plays based on everyday situations or short videos
- Short presentations, followed by reactions, questions, and group discussion
- Discussions of short readings on a range of topics

Students may complete short writing activities such as reactions to topics and discussion board posts.

**Note:** Monday, January 19, 2026, is Martin Luther King Day; no classes will be held.

### **PARTICIPATION/ATTENDANCE**

Your attendance at every class meeting is important. Frequent absences jeopardize your success in class. You will be allowed **three (3) unexcused absences which will not affect your grade**. Any additional absences and repeated tardiness will negatively affect your overall performance, particularly on days when you are scheduled to present.

Attendance grades are calculated as follows:

- **0–3 absences: 100%**
- **4 absences: 90%**
- **Each additional absence: grade is reduced by 5%**

Absences will not count against your attendance grade if they are due to participation in an officially sanctioned University athletic event (documentation of your participation required), or observance of a religious holiday (see: [Religious Holidays](#)). No additional absences will be excused. Please understand that, aside from the circumstances listed above, it is not possible for the instructor to fairly assess the wide range of reasons students may miss class—many of which are understandable. This policy is intended to balance flexibility with fairness for all students.

If you are unable to attend class in person, you should discuss strategies with your instructor ahead of time or as soon as possible to make up missed content. Be proactive. If you know you will miss a class, it is your responsibility to let your instructor know in advance and arrange to complete any required work. Classes start promptly. If you have a prior commitment that cause you to arrive late on certain days, please inform your instructor in advance. Accumulating a total of 75 minutes out of 110 minutes of tardiness (defined as arriving 5 minutes or more late) will result in an unexcused absence.

### **GRADING**

Class Engagement (attendance & participation)	40%
Preparation & Homework	20%
Speaking Assessments	20%
Collaborative Vocabulary Development	10%
Informal Assessments & Reflections	10%

Grades are calculated in terms of percentages, and do not conform to a curve.

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Letter grade	A+*	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
Numerical index	99.00+	94-98	90-93	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	65-69	64-

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\*Only for extraordinary performance across the board; No rounding up.

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### ACADEMIC, MENTAL, AND PHYSICAL SUPPORT

Student life can be intense. Please take care of yourself, and if you find that you are struggling, do not wait to seek support. Let your instructor know when you need help. Our goal is to foster a classroom culture grounded in flexibility, care and mutual respect—one that depends on consistent engagement, empathy, and clear communication. While we will work to create supportive structures and model these expectations, we also rely on you to help build this community by communicating openly and offering feedback so adjustments can be made when needed. Most importantly, please contact your Dean or Advisor, who can connect you with appropriate support. You are also encouraged to familiarize yourself with the services available through Columbia and Barnard:

- <https://health.columbia.edu/services/ods>
- <https://www.barnard.edu/health>
- <https://covid19.columbia.edu>
- <https://thefoodpantry.studentgroups.columbia.edu>
- <https://cc-seas.financialaid.columbia.edu/deans-fund>

### LEARNING PREFERENCES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

We acknowledge in our courses that people learn in different ways. For example, having visuals to support text may work better for some students, whereas others learn better by listening to the instructor. Please talk to your instructor about your learning preferences, so we can make the course work as well as possible for everyone. If you have, or suspect, a disability of any kind, please be sure to contact the office of disabilities (see link below) so that accommodations can be put in place. The earlier we know about it the better it will work.

### PLACEMENT EXAM

If you have prior knowledge of German, you must take the German placement exam so we can help you to find the best level. You can find information on the test here:

<https://germanic.columbia.edu/content/germanplacementexam>. Or you can contact Jutta Schmiers-Heller for Columbia Irene Motyl-Mudretzkj ([imotyl@barnard.edu](mailto:imotyl@barnard.edu)) for Barnard.

### COLUMBIA AND BARNARD POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The **Columbia and Barnard Policy on Academic Integrity** forbids students to hand in work (homework, vocabulary lists, essays, etc.) that has been edited by a tutor or in any way authored or rewritten by someone other than the student. It is crucial that all work is completed by the students themselves and reflect their personal language level. Please note that extensive use (= translation of a sentence and/or more) of a translation tool such as Google translate or any AI tool, violates academic integrity. If you feel you need tutoring, speak to your instructor or contact Jutta Schmiers-Heller (js2331) for Columbia or Irene Motyl-Mudretzkj (imudretz@barnard.edu) for Barnard for permissible tutoring guidelines. Please also visit the following websites on academic integrity and the honor code:

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>  
<http://www.college.columbia.edu/honorcode>

### **GERMAN GRAMMATICAL GENDER**

Nouns in German have a gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter) that often does not obey any apparent logic. The German language also assigns humans a gender, and German is not special for having a rigid binary gender system. Pervasive gender normativity is reflected in our use of language, and language instruction is one of the spaces in which such traditional structures are reinforced. At Columbia and Barnard, we strive to be respectful and inclusive. Whereas we still need to learn language in its normative form, we encourage you to be aware of the implications of such norms and to be attentive to your classmates' and instructors' desires. Please contact your instructor right away should you have any preferred name and/or preferred pronoun by which you would like to be addressed. Although there are limitations to what the language allows grammatically, the German Department faculty and staff are committed to finding solutions that work for everyone.

### **GERMAN STUDIES**

Direct questions about language courses German at Columbia to **Jutta Schmiers-Heller**. For questions about German major, minor, and concentration (before FA24), contact **Prof. Annie Pfeifer**, 415 Hamilton Hall, x4320 (ap750@columbia.edu). Barnard students should contact **Irene Motyl-Mudretzkij** (imotyl@barnard.edu).

### **DEPARTMENTAL ONLINE PRESENCE**

Webpage: <https://germanic.columbia.edu> | <https://german.barnard.edu>.

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/cugermanic/>

X: @CUGermanic

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CUGermanic>

### **DEUTSCHES HAUS**

(420 W. 116 St.) is a center for academic, cultural, and social exchange. Programs and events include lectures, films, conferences, recitals, art exhibits, and gatherings like Kaffeestunde. All levels of German students are encouraged to attend events which provide students with a great opportunity to practice speaking German. <https://germanic.columbia.edu/deutsches-haus>.