

German UN2520 - Intermediate Conversation Fall 2026



Intermediate German Conversation
TR, 2:40-3:55pm

Instructor: Simona Vaidean
Office Hours: Mondays & Thursdays, 1:00 - 2:00
(403 HH) or on Zoom by appointment:
<https://columbiauniversity.zoom.us/j/6892634840>
Email: scv16@columbia.edu

COURSE PREREQUISITES:

Desire to speak lots of German! Students in Intermediate Conversation should have completed the equivalent of two semesters of college German or placed at the Intermediate level at Columbia. This conversation group is designed for students who are either taking Intermediate German I or II and would like additional practice or who only take this class because they wish to maintain their spoken German.

This is a 2-point course and **does not count towards the language requirement.**

The course aims to:

- Build confidence speaking and understanding German in everyday situations
- Provide conversation practice on topics of your choice
- Improve comprehension of German spoken at natural conversational speed
- Expand active and passive vocabulary
- Maintain written German through short writing activities

No textbook required.

More specific registration information: [Columbia Bulletin](#), [Vergil](#), or the [Barnard Registrar](#).

An electronic version of this syllabus will be available under: <https://germanic.columbia.edu>.

For all questions about the courses, please contact **Jutta Schmiere-Heller**

(js2331@columbia.edu), Language Program Director at Columbia, or **Irene Motyl-Mudretzkyj**
(imotyl@barnard.edu), Senior Associate of the German Department at Barnard.

COURSE GOALS AND SESSION FORMAT

- **Course goals:**

1. Improve your ability to speak, understand and navigate German in everyday situations
2. Practice Conversation on topics of interest, such as:
 - a. Deutschland, Österreich und die Schweiz - gestern und heute
 - b. Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Länder (z. B. die Wiedervereinigung, Einwanderung)
 - c. Deutschsprachige Nachrichten, Musik, Literatur, Politik
 - d. Deutschsprachiger Film
 - e. Grammatik - Wiederholung und Vertiefung nach Interesse
3. Strengthen listening comprehension of German spoken at normal conversational speed;
4. Expand active and passive vocabulary through a shared class vocabulary (Google Doc);
5. Maintain written German through short writing activities, such as reactions to topics/texts and a weekly journal.
6. Develop and practice presentational skills through individual and group presentations.

- **Session format:**

Class sessions will include a variety of activities throughout the term, such as:

1. Daily warm-ups concentrating on everyday needs and community building
2. Vocabulary practice (collaborative vocabulary list) through activities such as Kahoots, etc.
3. Paired / small group conversations and interviews on a variety of topics
4. Dialogs and role plays based on everyday situations and videos
5. Student presentations, with reactions and follow-up discussions
6. Web-based and audio-visual presentations
7. Discussions of short readings on various topics
8. Web-based reports by individuals and/or small groups.
9. Work with various media related to the topics of your choice

SYLLABUS:

Class content is student-driven and consequently there is no pre-set weekly plan. Together, we will decide which topics to explore, and we will develop our schedule as we go. Our topics and progress will be documented in a running weekly log. Thus, by the end of the semester, you will have a clear record of everything we will have accomplished.

EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES:

- **Engagement:**
Stay engaged and proactive and communicate with your instructor. The more you engage and ask questions, the more you will learn. Engagement inside and outside of class is expected and counts significantly toward your grade.
- **Homework:**
Homework will be kept at a reasonable level and is scheduled to align with class content. Day to day homework provides extra practice and is usually due before next class. Other assignments, such as oral presentations, have more flexibility. If you are unclear about requirements or assignments, please contact your instructor as soon as possible – don't wait until after the deadline.
 - **Late homework:** Homework must be submitted on time in the requested format (paper or electronic) to receive full credit. Assignments submitted late will incur a 5% deduction for each day they are overdue. Homework submitted more than 10 days after the deadline will not be graded.
- **Attendance.** Your attendance at every class meeting is important. Frequent absences jeopardize your success in the course.
 - Our class meets twice a week for 75 minutes each, and you are allowed **two (2) unexcused absences** without penalty to your attendance grade. Any additional absences or 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/0-2 absences: 100%**
 - **4 absences: 90%**
 - **Each additional absence: attendance grade is reduced by 5%**
 - Absences will not count against your attendance grade if they result from participation in an officially sanctioned University athletic event (with required documentation of your participation) or the 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 many individual reasons students may miss class, even when those reasons are understandable. This policy is intended to balance flexibility with fairness for all students.
 - If you are unable to attend class, it is your responsibility to notify your instructor in advance or as soon as possible and make arrangements to complete any missed work.
 - Classes start promptly. If you have a prior commitment that may cause you to arrive late, please inform your instructor in advance. If you are consistently late without an excuse, your instructor will give you a warning. If it persists, you will receive an **unexcused absence**. All instances of lateness will be recorded and may negatively affect your grade.

- **Device Policy.** The use of electronic devices, including but not limited to smartphones, tablets, and laptops, will at times be prohibited during class sessions. While learning to use appropriate digital resources is an important part of language study, class time is limited, and face-to-face interaction with your peers and the instructor is a priority. Your instructor will inform you in advance if a particular class activity requires the use of an electronic device.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

As the **Columbia and Barnard Policy on Academic Integrity** makes clear, the work you submit in any class must be your own. Handing in work (homework, essays, etc.) that has been edited or in any way authored, translated, or rewritten by someone—something—other than you is not permitted. In a language course, this means that the common practices of asking someone to look over your work, using online translation tools (e.g., to translate half a sentence, a complete sentence and/or more), or using AI, are, unless otherwise indicated by your instructor, not permitted. **A truly meaningful language education requires that *you* take an active role in your learning process, put forth consistent effort, and learn from any mistakes.** Linguistic development, in particular, depends on authentic practice and is ultimately a personal process. It is crucial that all work is completed by you and reflects *your* competency in German. The department has created grading mechanisms that minimize the impact of mistakes on your grade, but that will also impact your grade if you do use outside tools. (Your instructor will share more detailed guidelines for specific assignments).

AI technologies can offer valuable support for language learning when used thoughtfully. Rather than prohibiting these technologies entirely, we will explore responsible and appropriate ways to incorporate them into the learning process. Throughout the semester, we will discuss the opportunities and limitations of AI in language learning and work together to develop meaningful, productive, and responsible ways to use these technologies to support language development.

If you feel you would benefit from tutoring, please speak to your instructor or contact Jutta Schmiere-Heller at Columbia or Irene Motyl-Mudretzkyj 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>

ACADEMIC, MENTAL, and PHYSICAL HEALTH

Student life can get very intense. Please take care of yourself. If you feel that you need help in any way, please don't wait but act immediately. Let your instructor know that you are struggling. Our goal is to create a culture of flexibility and care in our class community, and we believe such a culture builds upon consistent engagement, empathy, and clear communication. We will try to create channels for these and model expectations, but we will also rely on you to help build our community and provide feedback so that we can make adjustments when needed. Most importantly, contact your Dean/Advisor so they can help you. In addition, visit Columbia's/Barnard's websites to know what services are available to you:

<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.

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.

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 Schmiere-Heller (js2331@columbia.edu) for Columbia and Irene Motyl-Mudretzkyj (imudretz@barnard.edu) for Barnard.

GERMAN STUDIES

Direct questions about language courses German at Columbia to **Jutta Schmiere-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-Mudretzkyj** (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

Deutsches Haus, located at 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>.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- **Grammar:**
<https://www.nthuleen.com>
<https://germanstudiesdepartmentaluser.host.dartmouth.edu>
- **Dictionaries:**
 - **English/German and German/English**
<https://dict.leo.org/german-english/>
<https://www.dict.cc>
<https://de.thefreedictionary.com/hunger>
 - **German/German**
<https://www.dwds.de>
<https://www.duden.de>

GRADING:

Daily preparation / homework	20%
Weekly writing assignments	10%
Collaborative Vocabulary List	10%
Oral presentations	10%
Final oral interview	10%
Class attendance and participation	40%

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING SCALE

Letter grade	A+*	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
Numerical index	99.00+	94-97	90-93	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	65-69	64-

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