Updated 9/2/2026

Japanese Language Class Placement Guidelines

All students who have have had significant exposure to Japanese are encouraged to take a placement exam. The exam is a diagnostic exam, not an achievement test. Its purpose is solely to help us place you in the right language class within our sequence, i.e. the class that is neither too easy nor too hard for your current abilities. The placement exam will take place on [CDT]. It will assess reading and writing abilities as well as spoken communication skills.

If you would like to take the placement exam, please fill out this google form. If you have any questions, please contact the Chair of Asian Languages and Cultures, Professor Arthur Mitchell at Macalester Asian Languages & Culture Chair (alc-chair@macalester.edu)

We understand, meanwhile, that you may need to create your schedules in the early summer months. Thus, until a final determination can be made through the placement exam, please use the information below to help predict which Japanese course will be most appropriate for your level of Japanese.

JAPA102, JAPA204, and JAPA306 are only offered in the spring semester. If you find you are best matched to one of these courses, consider enrolling in a class one level lower or one level higher in the interest of remaining engaged in Japanese language study from the fall semester.

Course & Textbooks Overview

Class	Sem.	Textbooks	Kanji*
JAPA101	Fall	Genki 1 (3rd Ed.): Chapters 1~6	58
JAPA102	Spring	Genki 1 (3rd Ed.): Chapters 7~12	145 (87)
JAPA203	Fall	Genki 2 (3rd Ed.): Chapters 13~17	224 (79)
JAPA204	Spring	Genki 2 (3rd Ed.): Chapter 18~23	327 (93)
JAPA305	Fall	Task-Based Learning Japanese for College Students Vol. 2	447 (120)

JAPA306	Spring	Task-Based Learning Japanese for College Students Vol. 3	567 (120)
JAPA407	Fall	Authentic materials	
JAPA408	Spring	Authentic materials	

* Cumulative number of Kanji in the sequence (number of Kanji learned in that class)

Japanese 101: First Year Japanese I (Fall Semester)

In JAPA101, a class designed for complete beginners, students will learn how to talk in the polite form about what they are and what they are not, how to buy things in a store and order from a menu, what they do in their daily lives (past, present, and future), and what past experiences were like. It will cover basic syntax and grammar, including verb and adjective conjugations and the *te*-form for verbs. By the end of the semester, students will be able to write short descriptions of their experience. We will learn the two writing syllabaries - *hiragana* and *katakana* - as well as a number of basic kanji characters.
Genki 1: Chapter 1~6 (Lessons Overview Page)

Japanese 102: First Year Japanese II (Spring Semester)

In JAPA 102 students learn how to express what they like to do, what they are good at doing, what they want to do, what they have to do, and what they have done, as well as how to give reasons and advice. They also study different expressions to describe family and friends (what they do, where they live, what they look like, etc.). By the end of JAPA102, students are expected to be able to hold a basic conversation on the above topics in both casual and polite speech styles, and to write a short paragraph on familiar topics. In addition, they will continue to learn more kanji characters.
Genki 2: Chapter 7~12 (Lessons Overview Page)

Japanese 203: Second Year Japanese I (Fall Semester)

In JAPA 203, students continue to learn how to engage in conversations on various topics in daily life. Specifically, for instance, they learn to express what they give/receive on various occasions, how to talk about travel plans, and how to convey hearsay information. By the end of JAPA 203, students are expected to use both casual and formal speech styles. Additionally, they will be able to understand short passages and write simple multi-paragraph compositions on everyday topics like part-time work and travel.
Genki 2: Chapter 13~17 (Lessons Overview Page)

Japanese 204: Second Year Japanese II (Spring Semester)

In JAPA 204, students continue to learn how to engage in conversation and express opinions, but now with increasingly complex grammar. For example, students learn to talk with superiors such as professors and work supervisors and how to give advice respectfully. Towards the end of the semester, students also start to read simple passages on social issues such as the environment and inequity, a practice that will continue into the third year. By the end of JAPA 204, students are expected to be able to express their opinions and write multiple paragraphs about everyday topics as well as topics beyond their daily life.
Genki 2: Chapter 18~23 (Lessons Overview Page)

Japanese 305: Third Year Japanese I (Fall Semester)

In JAPA 305, students will engage in "task-based" learning. This means that while students will continue to develop their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and kanji, the focus will shift to their ability to utilize them in communicating their ideas. Students will discuss various topics and express their thoughts in writing. The topics we cover can range from casual everyday issues we encounter in our lives to social issues that engage us to think at a deeper level. The formal written style will also be introduced.
Task-Based Learning Japanese for College Students, Vol. 2 (Lesson Overview Page)

Japanese 306: Third Year Japanese II (Spring Semester)

JAPA 306 will continue the "task-based" learning style of 305. This course will introduce more topics that engage students to think critically about the issues that surround us in society. Grammar, vocabulary and kanji will generally become more complex, and commonly used idioms, both formal and informal, are introduced to increase their oral and written fluency. Although we will use a textbook, students will occasionally read authentic materials in preparation for the Fourth Year Japanese course.
Task-Based Learning Japanese for College Students, Vol.3 (Lesson Overview Page)

Japanese 407: Fourth Year Japanese (Fall Semester)

In JAPA 407, we will use authentic materials, such as internet articles, book chapters (both fiction and non-fiction), anime and manga. Through various materials, we will explore issues that impact our experiences and shape our identities, as well as the space Japan occupies in the world. Students are also expected to find materials on their own, introduce them to the class, and lead discussions. We will also pick up JLPT N1 and N2 level grammatical points, new vocabulary and kanji from these materials and learn to use them effectively in communication.

Japanese 408: Fourth Year Japanese (Spring Semester)

Like JAPA 407, JAPA 408 only uses authentic materials and covers similar topics. The course can be taken as a continuation of 407, or independently without taking 407. Students will investigate timely topics in Japan as well as those in the U.S. or other countries they are familiar with. Some grammar points, vocab, and kanji will include ones at the JLPT N1 and N2 level.