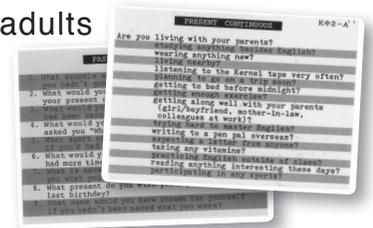


## CC Cards and JHS CC Cards

The Communication Cards were designed for use in university classes with students of at least lower-intermediate English speaking ability. They can also be used profitably and enjoyably with classes of adults at private language schools or company classes.



The cards are of three types: grammar-, conjunction-, and theme-based. All of them are meant to provide subjects for self-expression, as distinct from conversation. Taking acronymic liberties, we call them 'CC Cards'.

We also have a similar set of cards optimized for junior high school students, called the JHS CC Cards. These work in much the same way as the CC Cards, and are described later in this manual entry.

To use the CC Cards in large classes, you'll want one set of cards for every four to six students. A single set of cards can be sufficient for a small group (1–8 students).

### I. Procedure and Rules with Grammar-Based Cards

What follows is a summary of basic procedure for grammar-based cards. Elaboration and justification follow for each of the five steps below, along with ways to modify the procedure for the other types of cards.

1. In large classes (e.g. college classes), divide students into groups of three or four.
2. One student in each group is given a CC Card from which to read the questions.
  - Others may not look at the card.
  - No questions may be skipped.
  - After two to three questions, another student takes a turn as a reader.
3. Reader asks question 'to the air', not to a specific group member. Anyone who is ready to answer, may. An acceptable answer will include extra information.
4. After responding, that student repeats the question. The card-reader pays attention to be sure that the question has been repeated correctly.
5. The card-reader gives his or her own answer after everyone else has answered.

**Three general rules:**

- ‘Conversation’ is neither encouraged nor discouraged.
- No speaking Japanese.
- No silence.

**Step 1: In large classes (e.g. college classes), divide students into groups of three or four.**

The best compromise between interest and efficiency seems to be four-member groups, although three-member ones allow more individual speaking. The latter size will be the first choice when time is very limited.

In the first class or two, form up groups of those sitting next to each other. Later, with a class of 30 students, for example, have them count off from #1 to #8 until each has a number. Then have all the ‘ones’ sit together, all the ‘twos’, etc. This will give you six groups of four, and two groups of three students, who hopefully won’t already know all of one another’s secrets. (Using English to reveal themselves to each other is a big part of what CC Cards are about.)

In such classes as the preceding, the teacher circulates from group to group, participating with each for an equal amount of time as a fellow truth-revealer. In smaller classes, such as at private language schools or with language classes at companies, the teacher may wish to keep everyone together. This method can still be workable with as many as eight, including the teacher, or with even a single student. But the ideal size is still about four.

One note: although this explanation mainly refers to university classes, the CC Cards may be suitable for some senior high school classes as well.

**Step 2: One student in each group is given a CC Card from which to read the questions.**

Others may not look at the card. No questions may be skipped. After two to three questions have been answered by everyone (decide the number beforehand) other students will take their turns being readers.

When acting as a group member, the teacher will usually not be first to answer, unless that would also serve to clarify a difficult question. The teacher should help when necessary but not lead or officiate. Students will assume responsibility when it is shifted to them and they clearly understand what is expected of them.

With this activity we're seeking production, not perfection. Correction of speaking and pronunciation errors should be minimal, and is generally saved till the end of a student's turn. Vocabulary on the cards likely to give trouble should be quickly explained before, not during their use. If a group does get stuck or needs help in expressing themselves, and the teacher is not with them at the time, they should, of course, not give up and skip questions, but raise their hands for assistance.

**Step 3: Reader asks question 'to the air', not to a specific group member. Anyone who is ready to answer, may. A good answer will include extra information.**

Efficiency and comprehension are usually better served if responding is done at random, rather than in rotation. If answered in order, you and the students who have understood the question and are ready with answers must wait that painful time for the student who hasn't and isn't. Random responding allows a slower student to gather from preceding classmates' responses both what the question meant and some ideas to help fashion his or her own answer.

A problem with this procedure is that it's unnatural to ask questions into the air rather than directing them to an individual. This makes it awkward at first and easily unintentionally violated. But in general, make sure that this rule is followed.

Each person must give 'extra information' when they answer, preferably something interesting, but true. To simplify the idea, you may explain it as a 'two- or three-part answer'. It's the additional explanation, elaboration, etc. which make this an interesting and effective communication activity. Students should be cautioned, on the other hand, not to make 'a speech'. If you don't, those with greater ability and aggressiveness may dominate the proceedings.

*Examples:* "What time do you usually get up?"

*Bad example:* "I usually get up at 7:30. That's the time I set my alarm."

*Good example, two-part:* "I usually get up at 7:30. I usually wake up before my alarm goes off, but when it rings I always push the snooze button."

*Good example, three-part:* "I usually get up at 7:30. I usually wake up before my alarm goes off, but when it rings I always push the snooze button. But I don't completely wake up until I've had my morning coffee—with sugar."

**Step 4: After responding, that student repeats the question. The card-**

**reader pays attention to be sure that the question has been repeated correctly.**

After each person gives a full response to a question, he or she must repeat the question, again not directing it to anyone in particular, until only one, other than the reader, has yet to respond. The question must each time be asked exactly as it was previously read from the card. No shortcuts or paraphrasing.

It is the duty of the reader, not the teacher, to make sure that every question is correctly asked by each of the others. If any question is misstated and uncorrected, the teacher will admonish the card-holding reader for sleeping on the job. The teacher will neither scold nor assist the speakers when they flub the question (unless pronunciation or intonation is insufferable). When with any group, the teacher will also fully share his or her confidences, taking perhaps even less speaking time than the others, shedding any role of superiority.

**Step 5: The card-reader gives his or her own answer after everyone else has answered.**

When all but the reader have answered a question, they will repeat the question in unison to the reader. The reader will answer fully, just as the others have, and then proceed to the next question or else pass the card to another student, who will take his or her turn as reader.

Properly trained groups may thus be put on ‘automatic pilot’, which will essentially be the case with university (or senior high school) class groups other than the single one which the teacher is able to participate with at one time. You won’t be able to give much assistance or catch many answering errors, but the question practice will be correct, and a great deal of active and stimulating communication will be going on.

One other job of the teacher under the ‘automatic pilot’ plan: when in transit from one group to the next, to scan the room quickly, monitoring the output of all groups. This scanning should be visible—much of its value comes from the fact that students will know they are being monitored and thus take the activity that much more seriously.

*General rule 1: ‘Conversation’ is neither encouraged or discouraged.*

Unless you point it out, most students won’t notice the distinction between what they’re doing, expressing themselves in English, and what they may think

they came for, ‘English conversation’. Any one of the subjects on a card may, of course, develop into a conversation when and if members are moved to seek more information from a speaker than was divulged in his or her response. This is fine when it occurs spontaneously but should not be specifically encouraged.

Here are some reasons why: ‘Conversations’ tend to be dominated by the better or more aggressive speakers. A particular subject may be of no interest to one or more in the group. A given topic can easily be milked past the boring point for both students and yourself. ‘Conversations’ are also unlikely to allow the concentrated practice in target area structures and grammar afforded by the individual response method. If everyone in a group really gets enthusiastic about a subject, as will sometimes happen, let them have a party with it.

*General rule 2: No speaking Japanese*

With or without conversation, a festive atmosphere can develop in which students may get carried away and succumb to the temptation to express themselves in their native tongue. Be vigilant! Use of Japanese, especially by those on ‘auto-pilot’, is taboo, unless asking how to say something in English, using proper nouns which don’t translate, or the like.

*General rule 3: No silence*

The Japanese seem to have much greater tolerance for long silent pauses than do Westerners. There is a concomitant prohibition regarding self-assertiveness, which includes not being first to speak unless clearly mandated or senior. For the sake of your sanity and their guardians’ money’s worth, try to impose a ‘no silence’ rule. The random response method, though it runs counter to certain Japanese cultural tendencies, can be a practical help. With some classes (the more cultured the worse) you’ll still have to urge and cajole until, hopefully, it becomes a habit to not let waiting silence reign.

## **II. Theme-Based CC Cards**

Except for the added illustrations, these cards look like and are used in basically the same way as the grammar-based cards. However, there are some important differences. There are a greater variety of types and subjects among them. Not all use the ‘question’ format. They are potentially more interesting, but often require even more candidness and self-revelation. There are three differences in the rules as compared with grammar-based cards:

1. Answering is voluntary, not obligatory. A student may either respond or

pass on any given question or topic. If they decide not to respond, however, they must clearly say, e.g., ‘Pass’, rather than leave us guessing and waiting.

2. Questions, or topics, need not be repeated by volunteer speakers. (But the usual full disclosure is still expected of those who do respond.)
3. The reader need not be last to answer but should speak whenever ready. This can further help avoid time-wasting silence.

A quick comparison of the two types of cards will show why the rules are different. With the former, there’s no reason why every question shouldn’t be answered; with the latter, there’s no reason why every one should. Both types will elicit a lot of honest and interesting interpersonal communication.

### **III. Conjunctions Which Introduce Clauses of Cause**

These are a more structured variety of CC Cards. Students are provided a clause which volunteers will repeat with the appropriate conjunction, adding their own clauses to form honest, communicative compound sentences. They may not merely offer naked clause conclusions.

As with other CC Cards, these are for real English expression, not aids for mechanical language practice. To permit the former, students must be allowed and advised to ‘pass’ on any clause that is untrue for or does not relate to themselves. Hypothetical statements are out!

One or all of these conjunction cards may be used whenever the teacher deems appropriate. Their placement last in this article is because the rules are approximately those of the preceding theme-based, and because we consider them to be auxiliary, not mainstream CC Cards. It’s best to use them with groups of which the teacher is a member. Although not difficult (at least the first two) compared to the other two types, they seem to go better if the teacher is there to assist.

### **IV. Follow-through for any of the CC Cards**

If you wish, you can have students recall later what their classmates have said, putting it in third person grammatical form.

Oral or written reporting of something interesting learned from or about a fellow group member is a potentially worthwhile follow-through.

We have a complete set of adult-level CC Card follow-through homework

writing sheets, as well, with limited writing that should neither compromise other homework assignments nor consume much class time to correct. They are also all cutely illustrated.

## **V. Additional Thoughts and Suggestions on CC Cards**

Which cards to use, in what order, how frequently, and for how long per class, will vary with individual class circumstances. There are more than enough cards for two years with the same university (or senior high) students. We use them in most classes, usually at the end, for anywhere from 10 to 45 minutes of a 90-minute class. Our goal is about 20–30 minutes on grammar-based cards with juniors and 30–45 minutes on theme-based cards with seniors.

If you intend to use both grammar and theme-based cards with the same students, we strongly suggest that you first use all the grammar type that you intend to. With theme-based cards, there is a general relaxation of rules. They are rather more adult, both in content and especially in mode of use. Graduating to these is something that the students appreciate after the constrictions of the former. Don't go back and forth between card types. This will confuse them about which rules to follow, even if you remind them each time.

If a particular theme-based card still hasn't been covered after two, or a maximum of three consecutive classes, it might be best to either end it, or return to that card, picking up where you left off, at a later date. Themes, like conversations, can become tedious. Grammar-based cards, though, can usually safely be pursued to the end, and won't become boring because, generally, the grammar is unobtrusive and subordinate to the personally communicative thrust of the question topics.

Different groups of students in the same class will go through cards at varying speeds. When collecting cards at the end of class, ask each group what number they reached, in order to decide whether to continue with the same cards in the next class. Generally, we proceed through the card series at the pace of the faster groups, which means that some groups never finish given cards—not a matter of great concern. If one speedy crew does finish before the bell, you can always set them to some conversational subject of their or your choosing, while the others are still on their cards.

Groups that are considerably faster or slower, however, will generally be found to be violating at least one rule. The fastest may have a reader that is skipping, or they may not be giving a reasonable amount of extra information

when responding. The slowest may be using each subject for extended conversation, or be following a rotational response system while playing the ‘pregnant silence’ game. A spread of as much as double distance from the slowest to the fastest group is not unreasonable, and all should be praised for their efforts. Any disparity beyond that would indicate that rules basic to plan and progress have been compromised.

Of course, the better the students’ English speaking ability, the more success and efficiency you will have using CC Cards, and they won’t work at all well with students of less than lower-intermediate level. But it is equally important for optimum results that the morale of the class and spirit of cooperation with each other and the teacher be high. ‘Auto-pilot’ groups in the classroom cannot simply be forgotten while the teacher takes a break or spends lengthy periods with others. Try to get around and communicate at least briefly with each group before the bell rings.

Students are very aware of the teacher’s presence and sensitive to his or her concern for their progress, responding to respect and enthusiasm. Praise when possible, admonish when necessary, but don’t let them feel ignored.

Still, the more responsibility students accept, the better. One suggestion, especially for early efforts with the cards, is to give each group a piece of paper on which to keep count of their own specific rule violations, such as use of Japanese (even an ええと...) or going over ten seconds with no one speaking. Have one student per group monitor each rule. (Two rules = two monitors.) At the end of class, give recognition or some small prize to the group which can show the lowest number of slip-ups. They will accept this challenge in good spirit and comply honestly.

## VI. Junior High School-level CC Cards

In 2014, we developed a set of junior high school-level CC Cards (JHS CC Cards) along the same principles as the CC Cards, but with grammatical and thematic content more suitable for those younger learners.

The cards are color-coded according to the level of grammar they focus on: the pink set includes some of what is taught in English classes in the first year of Japanese public junior high school; the yellow set, the second year; the blue set, the third year. Using the pink set satisfies a PLS 1st Rank require-



ment.

Though our conversation classes are not *'juku'* (cram school) and our aim is not to help kids cram for school tests, we nonetheless do them a great service—and increase the appeal of our lessons to the guardians—when we help students grasp, through communicative activities, the grammar that they must also study as a scholastic subject.

For this reason, it is good to expose our kids to each set of JHS CC Cards a year before they will see the corresponding grammar in school. We use the pink set with elementary school 6th graders, the yellow set with junior high 1st graders, and the blue with junior high 2nd graders—assuming these students have been studying with us long enough to be up to the challenge.

The cards of each color-coded set are further ordered numerically. There is logic to the ordering of many of the cards, though some are numbered arbitrarily. Follow the order or not as you see fit. What is more important is that the 'Grammar' cards be covered before the 'Theme' ones. (You'll find either 'Grammar' or 'Theme' printed in the upper left corner of each card.) The 'Theme' card topics tend to be more open-ended and less amenable to a pattern-sentence-based approach.

The JHS CC Cards give students practice using grammar they've already learned; they are not designed to teach these grammatical concepts from scratch. Before using a new card, confirm that the kids have been exposed to its grammar already—they'll sometimes have encountered it embedded in other games or activities that were primarily or ostensibly about 'something else'.

### **Changes to standard CC Card procedure**

1. The kid holding the card reads out a question, and those who are ready to answer raise their hands. You choose who will answer.
2. The person who answers then repeats the question, and you choose someone else to answer. Repeat this until everyone has answered (or declined to).
  - i. With 'Grammar' cards, every student should give their answer for every question.
  - ii. But with 'Theme' cards, students can elect to 'pass' on certain questions

if they don't wish to answer them.

3. Finally, all children should ask the original questioner (who is holding the card) the same question.
4. You will have each kid read either two or three questions on a card before passing it to the next in turn.

### Other recommendations for JHS CC Cards

- To keep the exercise engaging, challenge kids to give detailed, memorable (but true) answers to each question—answers which extend beyond the basics. Tell them that it's up to them to communicate actively, to freely offer interesting information; their teacher and peers shouldn't have to drag it out of them with a barrage of questions.
- As a student speaks, she is likely to make English errors; you'll correct these without seeming to correct. In other words, empathize, agree, nod your head and show that you're following along; and as you do this, make unobtrusive corrections as though these were natural responses to what she's saying<sup>2</sup>. Once students are hip to your method, they'll learn to incorporate these comments without becoming overly self-conscious. Example:
 

S: Yesterday, I go to store with sister...

T: Oh, you *went* to *the* store with *your* sister...

S: Yes, I... *went* to *the* store with your—with *my* sister, and we bought...
- When you give your own answer to a question, this answer should be expanded to give students extra comprehensible input, and to let them learn more about you. But don't overdo it—students should still have the majority of the talking time.
- Don't camp out on one question or card for very long. We aim for variety—to touch on a question/topic briefly, then move on—because any given subject may be of interest only to some students, while others who are uninterested may not participate, or may comment only because they feel compelled to. A variety of topics covered in succession increases the likelihood that we'll find something of interest to each. For this reason, unlike many other PLS

<sup>2</sup> But sometimes, especially with a weaker student, you may elect to not interrupt a halting flow, but delay a pronunciation or grammatical correction until after a student has spoken. It's often both psychologically appropriate and true to communicate that this is a tricky part of English that they all need reminding of (all repeating a pronunciation correction). But, exercise this option quickly, so as to not sidetrack the whole operation.

activities, we don't review prior questions in the following lesson.

- We do, however, have homework follow-through papers for each card which we recommend using with all students who are able to write or “stretch to write” at that level. As the English and Japanese instructions atop each sheet clearly say, students write sentences (a minimum of two, a maximum of eight) at home, on their choice of either one or two of the topics that you've covered in class that week. In a larger class, the teacher may opt to limit students to a single topic. Assign a number of topics and sentences that, while giving the students an attainable challenge, will not require so much in-class checking that your basically aural/oral English class becomes a writing-correction one.

The JHS CC Cards are a valuable component of our pre-JHS and JHS program. Use them to increase your students' powers of self-expression, and to prepare them for the English they'll go on to study in their schools. Happy communicating!