

# Using ARS: Promoting Teacher-Student Interaction at a Distance

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The *Teacher Journeys 2020* presentation under discussion here introduced viewers to the Attendance Record Sheet (ARS), a downloadable document for students that I used in my remote AY2020 university courses (see Appendix for an example ARS). The ARS not only allowed me to take student attendance and check students' progress but it also provided students with a reliable method of communication with me if they had any questions or concerns throughout the year.

As many are no doubt aware, communication between teachers and students during face-to-face lessons at Japanese universities is often minimal due to teacher time constraints before and after classes, and because students may be too shy to ask teachers questions directly. When I learned in March 2020 that classes would be moving online due to COVID-19, I thought that teacher-student communication would suffer further, but after doing some brainstorming I came up with the ARS.

The ARS is multifunctional. First, it allows me to take student attendance since I required students to submit an ARS for each weekly lesson. An additional benefit of this was that I could ascertain if a student had dropped a course or was experiencing difficulties of some kind if they did not submit an ARS in consecutive weeks. Second, it allows students to communicate with me via its three separate spaces. The first space is for students to inform me that they are clear about and engaged with each week's lesson. The second space is for students to give feedback about what (if anything) was fun or difficult for them that week (e.g. they enjoyed a Zoom breakout room discussion topic, they were having computer difficulties). The third space is for students to ask questions or give comments if they had any that week. In constructing the ARS, it was hoped that this last space would alleviate student anxiety as they could easily voice concerns and be assured of prompt and pertinent responses from their teacher.

## **Objectives**

- To introduce a tool for taking attendance while engaged in remote teaching and learning (RTL).
- To demonstrate how this tool can be used for opening and fostering effective channels of communication with students during RTL.

## **Practical Implications**

I found students receptive to using the ARS. They quickly learned that every week, without fail, there was a teacher-student communication channel available to them, and that their teacher would view and respond to each student's ARS questions and comments in a timely manner. Indeed, it was not unusual for students to express their appreciation in the third ARS space for how clear and easy the ARS made attendance for them during RTL and how it allowed them to ask questions or give comments privately and directly.

The ARS should by no means be considered an immutable document. In fact, an updated version of the ARS was created and used from the AY2020 fall (i.e. second) semester. The changes made reflected the fact that the spring semester ARS, while useful and fully capable of fulfilling its role as an attendance-taking and communication tool, nevertheless required some modification. Experience with the ARS in the first semester helped in the construction of a clearer, more attractive, and more practical version to be used in my courses in the fall semester. Improvements included providing clearer instructions, color coding the ARS to match students' university colors, and including an ARS file name example and instructions for students regarding how to properly rename their ARS documents prior to submission. After asking students directly for their input about the ARS at the end of AY2020, further changes were made. The AY2021 version features a new "open share" space that lets students add whatever they wish. For instance, students could use this space to inform me of any new vocabulary or English expressions that they learned from that week's lesson. This space was included so that students would have additional opportunities to

reflect on their learning as they continue to study remotely.

In any event, readers are encouraged to consider the ARS and think about how it may be used for their own courses. If they find the ARS usable in its current form, they are welcome to adopt it as is. They should also feel free to modify it to better match their own teaching situations. They may of course also wish to construct their own version of the ARS to best suit their own course needs, pedagogical goals, and teaching style.

## Reflective Conclusion

In the end, the ARS was meant to function as a multipurpose attendance and communication tool, and I believe that it performed its various roles well. However, it should be noted that the ARS brings with it a few potential drawbacks. Research into students' perceptions of attendance during RTL revealed that they generally found other attendance-taking methods less troublesome compared to ARS completion and submission, for instance, by their using their university learning management system's "Send Attendance" feature (if enabled) or by teachers taking attendance solely by counting weekly assignment submission (Rubrecht, 2021). Nevertheless, that research revealed that students still viewed the ARS favorably and engaged with it in a positive manner. In fact, further analyses revealed a 95% ARS submission rate for AY2020, and 55% of submitted ARSs were completed in full, that is, students communicated something in all three ARS spaces, even when they were not required to do so. The comments and feedback students provided clearly indicated that they found the ARS to be straightforward, reliable, and useful as both an attendance-taking method and teacher-student communication tool.

A further potential drawback is that teachers must expend some time and effort processing each ARS, that is, they must download them, mark each student "present" via their ARS submission, read through each one, address students' feedback, questions, and concerns as needed, and then properly file away each ARS received. I personally felt this time and effort was worthwhile as I could stay on top of my students' progress in my courses, address their questions or problems quickly, and show them that even though we were separated from each other that I was willing to go the distance to see that they

learned the course content, even considering the circumstances. These are precisely the reasons why I will continue to use the ARS in all of the courses that I am required to teach remotely.

## References

Rubrecht, B. G. (2021). Student views of attendance at Japanese universities in the era of COVID-19: A preliminary look. In *The Osaka Conference on Education 2020 Official Conference Proceedings* (pp. 185-199). IAFOR. <https://papers.iafor.org/submission59187/>

## About the Author

Dr. Brian G. Rubrecht is a Professor in the School of Commerce at Meiji University in Tokyo, Japan. His professional and research interests include aspects of language learning motivation, identity, pronunciation, translation and interpretation, and cultural aspects that influence the learning of a foreign language.

## Link to presentation on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7DmlaiZpSs>

## Appendix: Example Attendance Record Sheet (ARS)

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### Attendance Record Sheet (ARS)

**Your attendance (出席) for each lesson is important!**

Each week if you followed the **Weekly Schedule** and you ...  
 ... attended a Zoom lesson with your teacher **OR**  
 ... watched an on demand video for that week's lesson **OR**  
 ... completed a class assignment for that week's lesson ...  
 ... then please complete this ARS and email it with all class assignments for the week in one email on lesson day after class but before midnight.

This ARS = your attendance grade and it is also part of your participation grade. Use either the .docx version or the .pdf version of ARS. It is fine to send ARS information by text in an email (for special cases only). Please remember to name your ARS file appropriately. Example:

Taro Tanaka Monday 3 June 24 ARS

<b>Name (in Romaji):</b>	→
<b>Student Number:</b>	→
<b>Class Day + Period</b> (examples: Monday 2, Friday 3)	→
<b>Lesson Day</b> (example: June 24)	→
<b>What did you learn in today's lesson (what was the topic)?</b> Please summarize.	→
<b>If something was fun or difficult about today's lesson, please explain.</b>	→
<b>If you need help with anything or if you want to tell me something, please write it here.</b>	→