

Academic Year 2026-2027
Centre of Buddhist Studies
The University of Hong Kong
BSTC 2008
Sanskrit Language I

Course Description:

Sanskrit, being one of the most ancient languages known to humankind, is considered by some to be a key to understanding human civilisation, in particular, the rich cultural, philosophical and religious heritage of India, whose influence on our world continues to be felt. Students of history, history of science, comparative literature, general and historical linguistics, philosophy, and religion will discover that basic knowledge of the language greatly enriches their studies. For students who intend to specialise in different aspects of Indian Buddhism, a reading knowledge of Sanskrit is essential. This course will provide a comprehensive overview of the language's history, structure, and grammar, covering topics such as scripts, phonetics, declensions, conjugations, and meters. Students are expected to read and comprehend simple Sanskrit passages by the end of the course.

Course Content:

This course is designed for absolute beginners; no prior knowledge of Sanskrit is required. This course will provide a comprehensive overview of the language's history, structure, and grammar, covering topics such as scripts, phonetics, declensions, conjugations, and meters. Students are expected to read and comprehend a simple Sanskrit passage by the end of the course. This course is not for speaking Sanskrit.

The course begins with basic Sanskrit grammar along with exercises selected from Buddhist texts. As the students learn and attempt the graded passages, all the grammar involved will be analysed, and doctrines will be explained to them in a gradual build-up manner. This includes the following: the Sanskrit alphabet, the Devanāgarī scripts, three genders, three numbers, different nouns and their declensions, different verbs and their conjugations, the present tense, the future tense, and the past tense verbs, participles and their functions, gerunds, sandhi, *and the* classification of sentences.

Objectives

- (1) To enable students to read and comprehend simple Sanskrit passages.
- (2) To enable understanding of the basic structure and grammar of the Sanskrit language.
- (3) To help students understand the Sanskrit Buddhist Literature.

Teaching and Learning Method: Lectures, class discussions, and tutorials.

Offering Semester	First Semester
Lecturer	Dr. Amrita Nanda
Office	Rm 4.13, 4/F Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus
Tel:	39175077
Email	nanda@hku.hk
Schedule	To be confirmed
Class Venue	To be confirmed

Assessment:

50% coursework and 50% examination

Coursework 50%: This consists of three components:

- Class participation (10%) is assessed based on regular attendance and active involvement in discussions. Active involvement includes asking questions, offering comments or insights during class, responding to questions from the instructor or classmates, participating in group work, and respectfully engaging in classroom dialogue.
- The Mid-term Quiz (30%) will be held in the classroom after the reading week, with a duration of 1 hour (open book). The main focus will be on Devanāgarī writing, Romanisation from Devanāgarī, and identifying cases and conjugation forms.
- Weekly homework (10%), graded on accuracy and timely submission. Homework assignments will consist of short translation exercises, grammar practice, and brief reading comprehension tasks, based on material covered in class. Homework will be posted weekly on Moodle and should be submitted electronically through the platform by the stated deadline.

Examination (50%): Final examination at the end of the semester. Duration: three hours (Open book). The main focus will be on providing grammatical analysis and translation from Sanskrit to English.

Lecture Schedule

Lesson 1

- An Introduction to the Course
- Introduction to the Sanskrit Language
- Introduction to the Sanskrit Alphabet
- Introducing the Devanāgarī Scripts

Lesson 2

- Writing the Devanāgarī Scripts
- A General Introduction to Sanskrit Nominals:
 - Three Genders of Sanskrit Nouns
 - Three numbers in Sanskrit
 - Introduction to Eight Cases in Sanskrit

Lesson 3

- Declension of masculine nouns ending in *a*:
- Writing Complex Devanāgarī Scripts
- Indeclinable particles *ca*, *vā* and *api*

Lesson 4

- Introduction to Sanskrit Adjectives
- Practising Sanskrit to English translation exercises.

Lesson 5: Introducing the dative case, the vocative case, and the instrumental case.

- Introduction to Sanskrit Verbs:
- Verbal prefixes
- Three grades of strengthening verbs
- Class I, IV, VI, and X verbs
- Conjugation of Sanskrit verbs in the present tense

Lesson 6

- Introduction neutral nouns ending in *a*:
- The indeclinable particle *—iti*, *eva* and *sma*
- Introduction to Feminine nouns ending in *—ā*.
- *Anusvara sandhi*.
- Vocabulary and reading selected Sanskrit passages.

Lesson 7

- Causative verbs
- Mid-term quiz

Lesson 8

- Past Passive Participles form
- Suffixes *—tā*, *tva*, and *tas*.
- *Visarga sandhi*
- Reading selected Sanskrit passages.

Lesson 9

- Introduction to Personal Pronouns
- Introduction to nouns ending in *—u*
- Declension of masculine nouns ending in *—u*
- Declension of neutral nouns ending in *—u*
- *Vowel Sandhi*
- Vocabulary and Practising Sanskrit to English translation exercises.

Lesson 10

- Gerunds verbs
- Introduction to *—i* ending nouns:
- Declension of Masculine gender nouns ending in *—i*
- Declension of Neutral gender nouns ending in *—i*
- Declension Feminine gender nouns ending in *—i*
- Demonstrative Pronouns

Lesson 11

- Introduction to consonant sandhi
- Review for the exam

Note: The schedule provided is approximate and flexible. Adjustments may be made based on students' learning pace and interest.

Support options: Students are encouraged to seek help early if they have questions or encounter difficulties. Office hours will be available each week for individual consultation with the instructor. In addition, tutorial sessions can be arranged if there is sufficient demand.

Textbook

Dhammajoti, KL. (2021), *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts: An Elementary Grammatical Guide (4th edition)*, The Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong Ltd. Hong Kong. (Those who want to have a copy can directly buy from the Buddha-Dharma centre of Hong Kong: <https://buddhadharma.co/Reading-Buddhist-Sanskrit-Texts-An-Elementary-Grammatical-Guide>).

Handout: We will be selective in our use of the textbook. Therefore, handouts will be uploaded to Moodle before every class. Reading materials will be provided by the course instructor on Moodle before classes. In addition to the required readings, supplementary resources, and further readings will be made available to students who wish to deepen their understanding of the material. These may include recommended articles, digital libraries, reference websites, and extra passages for advanced practice.

Reference books

Ruppel, A.M. (2017). *The Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Speijer, J.S. (1998). *Sanskrit Syntax*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Bucknell, R.S. (1994). *Sanskrit Manual: A quick-reference guide to the phonology and grammar of Classical Sanskrit*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Thomas, E. (1994). *Introduction to Sanskrit: Part I*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

_____ (2000). *Introduction to Sanskrit: Part II*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Whitney, W. D. (1979). *The Roots, Verbs-forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

_____ (2003). *Sanskrit Grammar*. New York: Dover Publications.

Goldman, R. P., Goldman, S., Sally J. (2011). *An Introduction to the Sanskrit Language*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Monier, W. (1979). *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers.

Some of these references will be available on the course Moodle. Students are not required to buy these books.

Online Resources:

For Devanagārī script writing and alphabet pronunciation practice:

<https://enjoylearningsanskrit.com/sanskrit-alphabet-tutor/>

For additional Sanskrit Grammar practice:

<https://ubcsanskrit.ca/>

Sanskrit Dictionary

1. <https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWScan/2020/web/webtc/indexcaller.php>
2. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/apte/>

Note:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable, and any student found plagiarising is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:

<http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

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Mental Health and Wellbeing Statement

The Faculty of Arts is dedicated to supporting your overall well-being during your studies. Prioritise your mental and physical health and seek help when needed.

Key Resources:

- **Faculty Student Wellness Counsellor**
Ms. Trinity Pun
Room 4.05, 4/F, Run Run Shaw Tower, Centennial Campus
Tel: 3917 2279 | Email: trinityp@hku.hk
- **Career Development Advisor (including wellbeing-related concerns)**
Ms. Heidy Wan
Room 4.05, 4/F, Run Run Shaw Tower, Centennial Campus
Tel: 3917 0736 | Email: heidywan@hku.hk

- **Thrive@Arts:** wellness activities to de-stress, build resilience, and connect with peers. Stay tuned for upcoming events.
- **CEDARS Counselling & Psychological Services**
Tel: 3917 8388 | Email: cedars-cope@hku.hk
Online registration: cedars.hku.hk/cope/cps/online-registration
- **TourHeart+ Platform:** Free confidential online support, assessments, and exercises.
<https://sso.cedars.hku.hk/tourHeart/>
- **Wellness@HKU Portal:** Self-assessments, resources, and workshops.
<https://wellness.hku.hk/login>

Quick Reminders:

- Feeling stressed is normal. Seeking help early is a sign of strength.
- All services are free, confidential, and available to Arts students.
- In emergencies (after hours), contact CEDARS at <https://www.cedars.hku.hk/cope/cps/reach-out-for-help>.

Your well-being matters. Reach out — support is available.