



TOCHIGI

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Follow the QR code and it'll be sorted out in a couple of clicks.



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If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can scan the QR code or send an email to **tochigi@jalt.org**



Welcome

Dear Readers,

We are thrilled to welcome you to the inaugural issue of the JALT Tochigi publication—a space created by local teachers, for local teachers, to explore the vibrant world of language education together. Whether you are teaching young learners, high school students, university classes, or working in the private sector, this publication aims to connect us all under one shared passion: language teaching and learning.

Our goal is simple but important—to foster a supportive and dynamic community of educators where ideas, experiences, and resources can be freely exchanged. Over time, we'll be introducing a journal to feature peer-reviewed academic research to push the boundaries of our understanding, but we also want this publication to feel personal and relatable. From profiles of local teachers and schools to surveys on the challenges we face in our classrooms, this is your platform to share insights and learn from one another.

Expect to see discussions about the latest trends in language teaching, reviews of events and talks, and plenty of opportunities to network with your peers. We'll regularly feature guest speakers, host discussions and in-person meetups, and provide opportunities for you to share your own teaching stories and strategies. JALT Tochigi's strength will lie in the diversity of its members, and this publication is designed to celebrate and elevate that diversity.

Thank you for being part of this exciting journey. We can't wait to hear your voices, read your ideas, and help build an even stronger community of language educators here in Tochigi! Please see pages 3-4 for more information regarding how you can get involved.

Warm regards,

Chris Smith
Publications Chair
JALT Tochigi

Calling all... TEACHERS

Join our growing community by sharing some information about yourself, your school, your town, or an aspect of teaching. We would love to hear your opinions and invite you to submit something on one of the following topics:



Teacher profile

Introduce yourself!



School profile

Introduce your school



Conference/event review

Have you attended a JALT event? Share your experience!



Book review

Summarize, analyze, and critique an academic text.



Around Tochigi

Tell us about your town, your local festival, your favourite place to visit, etc.



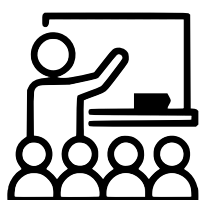
Teaching

Share an idea, a classroom strategy, an approach to a particular topic, a game, an activity, a technology or platform you find helpful, etc.



Free comment

Ask questions and share your opinions!



If you are interested in becoming an active member of the JALT Tochigi community and having your information and opinions featured in future issues, please check out the QR code to submit your ideas.



Calling all... SCHOOLS

We would also really like to feature some of the fantastic schools around Tochigi. Please feel free to showcase your school, share some ideas, or tell us what's going on! We would love to hear from you all.

Why not:

- Introduce your teaching team.
- Share some pictures of your classrooms and your learning environments.
- Tell us about your English programs and the number of students you teach.
- Tell us about any special language projects or activities you are undertaking.



If you are interested in having your school featured in these pages and helping the JALT Tochigi community grow, please follow the QR code below to make your submission.

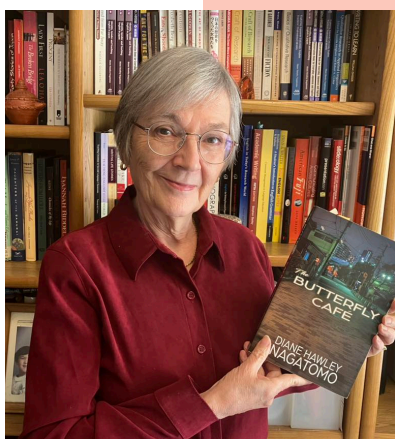




JALT Tochigi Event

PRESENTATION

Diane Nagatomo



Originally from the USA, Diane has been living and teaching English in Japan since 1979. She is a retired professor from Ochanomizu University but continues to teach part time at three different universities.

She has authored numerous EFL textbooks for the Japanese market since 1993. Her research interests include identity, gender, and teacher/learner identity in the Japanese context and her two books in this area are *Exploring Japanese University English Teachers' Professional Identity* and *Identity, Gender and Teaching English in Japan*. Her debut novel, *The Butterfly Café* was published in July 2023 and her next novel *Finding Naomi* is due to be published in November 2024.



On July 27th, Tochigi JALT proudly hosted a presentation by Diane Nagatomo at Utsunomiya University, the title of which was:

***From EFL Materials to Academic Books and Papers to Novels:
The Art of Balancing Different Writing Genres***

Those interested could attend in person or watch the presentation live on Zoom.

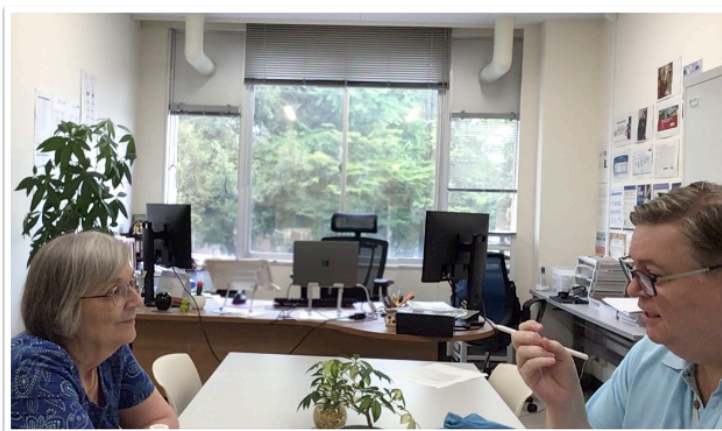
For those of you who couldn't make it, or for those of you who would like to experience it again, the presentation was recorded, uploaded to Tochigi JALT's YouTube channel, and can be viewed by scanning the QR code below.

As well as hosting the presentation, attendees were invited to a get-together afterwards, which provided an excellent opportunity to meet new people and catch up with old acquaintances.





Pre-event INTERVIEW Diane Nagatomo



Before her presentation at Utsunomiya University, Diane kindly sat down for a short interview with the President of JALT Tochigi, Joel Neff. Joel is a keen writer himself and was eager to ask Diane a range of questions about her approach and experiences writing academic books, papers, and novels.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Diane for her generosity in spending so much time with us. Her willingness to share her knowledge, insights, and advice was greatly appreciated by all who had the pleasure of attending and participating in the day's events.

We would also like to congratulate her on the release of her new book *The Butterfly Cafe* (Black Rose Writing) and wish her continued success with it and in all her future endeavours.

The following is a slightly edited transcription of the interview. In this transcript, fillers, false starts, and minor grammatical errors have been edited for readability, but the content, meaning, and context of the original conversation remain unchanged.

For those interested in viewing the full, unedited interview, please follow the QR code.



Interview

TRANSCRIPT

Joel: Having worked in academia and authored numerous research papers and formal textbooks, did your knowledge and experience of academic research help or hinder your transition to writing fiction?

Diane: I can answer this question from two points of view. My academic research is qualitative, and I've done a lot of narrative studies and interviewed people and looked at their lives and what makes them do the things that they do. I think that translated well into fiction, but in fiction, you can just make up stuff. In research, you can't make up things. You have to go with what people tell you. Sometimes, though, the truth is crazier than fiction, especially when I was doing my research on women in Japanese academia. So, I think that transition from research to fiction went well.

However, the thing that hindered my fiction, and I didn't really notice until some people started reading my first drafts, was, as you know, when you do academic writing, you can't use contractions in your sentences, and one of my friends pointed out, "It's interesting—you don't use any contractions in your novel. Is there a reason for that?" And I thought, "Oh, yeah, there is!" But I needed to get rid of that because you don't have to say "would not"; you can say "wouldn't" in fiction, so I had to go down on the level of formality.

With writing textbooks, the dialogues you write are often unrealistic—nobody would ever say that, but if you wrote those dialogues in fiction, no one would ever want to read it. So, that's one thing that was different.

Joel: So if I can lead on from that a little bit—when you talk about writing fiction, you're talking about writing in tone, writing in accents, and things like that. Was there anything in your academic background that helped you lean into that research and figure out how characters should speak—are they going to speak with an Australian, American, or Japanese accent, for example?

Diane: No. I don't think it did. When I was doing interviews with people, and then I transcribed them, and since I wasn't doing discourse analysis, just content analysis, I had to tidy up the language—even for the native speakers. I remember giving one of my participants the transcript, and she was horrified! She said, "I didn't realize I sound so inarticulate when I speak." I told her, "No, everyone sounds like that when you type up what people say verbatim. Nobody speaks grammatically. That's just the way it is."

Joel: I feel that a lot of people in the audience are in the same situation. We've all done academic writing; we all know the pitfalls. I think a few of us have tried fiction writing, and I think, as you've been talking about, not just contractions but just the style of everything. In academia, everything has to be cited and attributed, whereas in fiction, you want to hide all that as much as possible. , while in academia, everything has to be explicitly attributed. Does it feel like a different task?

Diane: It's a different mindset.

Joel: OK, so how many mindsets do you feel you write in?

Diane: Oh gosh, I don't know.

Joel: There's academic; there's fiction. Does textbook fit into academic?

Diane: No, they're different. I'll show you some examples—one I'm not too proud of, but you'll probably laugh at. It's a different mindset. I think the thing that people should do is read in the fields they're writing in. So, if you're writing academically, you should read academic materials. If you're writing fiction, you should read a lot of fiction. You get to know the difference between the two, even if you can't do it immediately without practice.

Joel: Right, that's an interesting point. So, about practice—do you see this as a practicable skill, or do you have to have a certain talent for it?

Diane: I think it's all practice. Well, I think some people are born with talent, of course. Some people can probably whip out a book with little effort. There's a Japanese writer named Akagawa Jiro, and I read somewhere that he just writes the first drafts and sends them off for publication. He was writing three or four books at the same time! If he's still around, I don't know—it was a while ago. But I think that's talent. For most people, it's practice—it's a craft. If you've read Stephen King's *On Writing*, you know definitely he's got talent, without a doubt. But it's a craft, and I think people can learn it.

Joel: So, how do you practice?

Diane: You write. You can't just think about writing or talk about writing—you have to do it.

Joel: I guess that makes sense. Is practicing writing fiction different from practicing writing academic?

Diane: Oh, yeah. When you're writing academically, especially as a student writing a thesis or report, your goal is to show your teacher how smart you are, that you've read all the materials, and that you know your stuff. But then when you graduate and you want to submit your papers to *JALT Journal* or something like that, nobody wants to know how smart you are, because everybody is that smart. You have to write in a different way that says I have some really interesting information I want to share with you. That's why your literature review in your thesis is 30-pages long, but they only give you 2,000 words for the entire research paper.

Joel: Where do you get your inspiration from for your different types of writing, and how do you capture those ideas when they come to you?

Diane: I don't know. I'm not sure if I get "inspired" with writing. For fiction, I just start writing, and sometimes something comes up, and I think, "Oh, that works. That's really good." Like in my novel that's coming out, I was writing a while ago, and suddenly out of the blue, a character is walking up her front porch and she slips on a pile of cow manure that someone left all over. And I thought, "Where did that come from?" I didn't wake up that morning and think I'd write about cow manure spread all over this girl's front porch in rural Nebraska, but it became an important part of the story.

Joel: I've read that in writing circles there are "architects" and "gardeners"—the gardeners plant seeds and let things develop organically, while the architects build scaffolding. Does that analogy make sense to you? And if so, which one would you be?

Diane: Well, with academic writing, I learned the hard way to be an architect. When I was writing my PhD dissertation, I kept writing myself in circles, and it didn't make sense. Then I thought, "Oh, I should do what I tell my students to do—make an outline!" Once I started outlining, making sure I had a topic sentence for each paragraph, it became so much easier. Academic writing is very linear.

So, in that sense, I think I'm more of a plotter. In some circles, they call it plotters and pantsers—the people who plot versus those who write by the seat of their pants. In fiction, I sometimes try to make a plot outline because I realize that maybe it helps to have a general direction.

Joel: And it comes to you as it comes to you?

Diane: Maybe. I don't know. I'm sure people who are better and more experienced than me have better ways of doing it. I'm still learning how to do this.

With writing textbooks, you make an outline of the material that you want to sell to the Japanese publisher, and you stick to that. So, these three different genres—academic writing, fiction, and textbooks—all have different ways.

And with fiction, if you've read Stephen King's *On Writing*, and *Kill Your Darlings*, I think that's probably the best advice ever. Sometimes I've killed so many darlings in my book, I think the police are going to come knocking on my door for murder!

Joel: Slight change, but the second half of that question is: how do you capture these ideas?

Diane: I just start writing them.

Joel: The classic stereotype is the writer walking around with a notepad, scribbling notes as they get their coffee in the morning.

Diane: That would be a good way to do it, and I think I should start doing that because a lot of ideas go into people's heads, mine in particular, and then 10 minutes later, you forget about them. So, a really smart writer would keep a notebook and make notes. One thing I do, though, when I read on my Kindle, is when I see an expression, or a sentence, or a word, I highlight it and save it for later. Sometimes, you come across a really good turn of phrase or a word you don't hear very often, and I think, "I'm going to use that!" Like the word *discombobulated*—OK I'm going to use that word somewhere.

Joel: That's a fantastic answer. I could go on for days about that, but let me get back to the questions here. Do you want to talk about ChatGPT and new tools?

Diane: OK, well, I don't really know much about ChatGPT, but a tool that I really like and use for all my writing, though maybe not for textbooks, and that's Scrivener. Have you heard of Scrivener? I think it's the best. It's great, cheap, and you can use it on all your devices. It's only around \$40, and to me it's a really good tool.

I even went to a Scrivener webinar recently. I got up in the middle of the night to attend it because I thought maybe I could learn something new. There were many things I didn't know—just things I learned on a need-to-know basis. So for me, that's the tool I find really useful.

As for ChatGPT, I don't really know how to use it yet. The same person who did the webinar on Scrivener also did one on ChatGPT, which I attended, but I've kind of forgotten what they said. After that, I asked ChatGPT to write a love scene for me because I don't feel comfortable writing that and I wanted to see what it could do. At first, it said, "We can't do that; we have standards," and I thought, "OK, not *that* kind of love scene!" It was interesting—the "steamy eyes" and whatever—but I got a good laugh out of it. I might have taken a couple of expressions from that, but I don't really see that it's useful for me right now. In the future, though, I think it'll be used by a lot of people, and I'm glad I won't be teaching then. I can scare my students into not using ChatGPT now, and the ones who try get in big trouble.

Joel: We could have thousands of hours of conversation about ChatGPT, but for now... let's move on. What about writers who have inspired you, particularly in the Japan context?

Diane: Well, in Japan, there's Suzanne Kamata, based down in Shikoku. She's been writing for many years. Back in the late 90s, she started an online writers' group with someone named Jane Nakagawa, who used to be active in JALT. I've followed Suzanne's career and asked for her advice on things. She's got a new novel coming out, which is quite interesting.

Then there's Karen Hill Anton, who used to write for The Japan Times. She wrote a memoir that's probably the best memoir about Japan I've ever read. There are a lot of great Japan-based writers.

Joel: Can I ask how you connect with everyone? Are there conferences?

Diane: There's the Japan Writers Conference, which is coming up in October, I believe, in Fukushima. I don't think I can go this year, but I've gone many times, and it's definitely worth attending. I've met a lot of people through various groups. You know, Japan is a small town for foreigners, so I've connected with people through groups like the Foreign Wives Association and different conferences.

Joel: I wasn't going to ask for advice, but I will now. What advice would you give to someone looking to make the transition from academic to fiction writing?

Diane: Write. Join a writers' group. When I submitted the manuscript for my second academic book, *Identity, Gender, and Teaching English in Japan*, I thought, "OK, now I want to write fiction." So, I went online and found a meetup for the Tokyo Writers Workshop. I went to one meeting just to see what it was like, and you have to read other people's writings. There are a lot of science fiction writers there, and I got lots of good advice. It really made me feel like I was part of a writing community. So, find people who are writing in the field that you're writing in, and you just have to write. Don't dream of instant success.

Joel: Well, this is a bit off the list again, but you're traditionally published, right? You have a publisher...

Diane: It's an indie publisher.

Joel: ...but I know there's a lot of self-publishing happening these days. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Diane: Yeah, I think that... from what I can see, a lot of people self-publish because they've been rejected a couple of times by publishers, and there are often good reasons for being rejected. I think some people are in such a hurry or so enamoured with seeing their name in print that I think they self-publish a bit too hastily. And then, you know, the only readers they end up having are maybe their relatives and a couple of friends—if they're lucky. And yeah, if they're lucky, those friends will give them five stars.

So, I don't have anything against self-publishing. There have been some huge successes in self-publishing. I mean, *Fifty Shades of Grey* was originally self-published, and look at what happened there.

Joel: And a lot of romance authors are big names who started in self-publishing or transitioned from self-publishing to traditional publishing.

Diane: If you self-publish something and it hits the market—like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which was... well, very soft porn, or maybe not so soft—publishers will look at you because they see you've sold all these books. But they're not going to look at you if you've self-published and only your grandmother and family have read it, right? That book may never see the light of day with a traditional publisher unless you've really hit the market in some way.

So, from what I've noticed about people who self-publish, maybe they're aiming for a small audience. Maybe they're publishing their memoir for their family to read or something. But my advice is, don't be in such a hurry.

Joel: OK, I'm going to help us move along since we're running out of time. A lot of students here and at other universities are subscribed to services like *XReading*, the graded reader series. Have you considered writing a graded reader or thought about doing that?

Diane: I haven't really thought about it. But when I had the manuscript for *The Butterfly Café*, I'm a bit of a geek and ran it through Lex Tutor to see the difficulty of the vocabulary. And it was a pretty easy read in terms of vocabulary. The unknown words that Lex Tutor couldn't figure out were the Japanese words, like 'genkan' or 'butsudan' or something like that. So, I think for readers, I could recommend the book from a vocabulary point of view. It shouldn't be too challenging for students. But no, I haven't really thought of writing a graded reader.

Joel: Right. You spoke at the Materials Writers Conference, right?

Diane: Yes, in Okinawa. [Materials Writers, Okinawa JALT Summer Symposium 2023]

Joel: So, about a year ago or two, we did a program about graded readers, and it was a lot more difficult than all of us thought. Everyone had this idea that we'd just walk in and write these stories. But out of 30 people in the room, I think two actually managed to do it. I feel like that's typical of writing in general.

Diane: Oh, definitely. Even things like children's books, picture books, or ABC books—they're not as easy as you think they're going to be. It's like qualitative research. It looks easy when you read the paper, but when you start putting it all together, you realize, OK, this is a lot harder than I thought. Or writing a questionnaire. What you see is just the surface—it's the tip of the iceberg.

Joel: OK, so we have time for one more. How about dealing with creative blocks?

Diane: Creative blocks. I don't know if I would call them creative blocks, but sometimes you just don't feel like doing it. And if you don't have deadlines or things to push you, maybe you don't get much done. But then I just read books or do something else during that time. I don't let it worry me too much. I'm good with deadlines though, so if I have a deadline to write something, I'll do the work well in advance. But yeah, creative blocks... Sometimes, like at the beginning of the pandemic when we were staying home, you'd think with all that time on your hands, you'd be super productive. But no—I was doing jigsaw puzzles and watching Netflix.

Joel: Right. Yeah, I was finishing my master's during the pandemic. I'd be out walking through the rice fields thinking, "I don't want to write anything anymore."

Diane: We were in front of the computer all the time with Zoom, and everything was just a lot more stressful than you'd think it would be.

Joel: Yeah, absolutely. Well, Diane, thank you! Thank you so much for your time.

References & Additional Reading

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Diane's academic papers



Connect with Diane on Goodreads





Your Thoughts SURVEY

We want to hear from you!

At the end of each issue, we explore a topic or question relevant to our teaching community. We invite you to share your thoughts and experiences by scanning the QR code and completing our brief survey. Your responses are completely anonymous and will help spark further discussion in our next issue. Let's keep the conversation going!

THIS ISSUE'S TOPIC

The use of AI in language learning



Join us!

Your Thoughts Forum

We invite you to join us in person to discuss this issue more.
It would be nice to meet you all and, of course, have a general chinwag!



Date: Saturday, February 1st

Time: 16:00-18:00

Location: Utsunomiya University, EPUU Commons,
Building 4, 2nd floor.

This will be a hybrid event. Those unable to attend in person are welcome to join us by Zoom.





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The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

JALT is a nonprofit professional organisation dedicated to the improvement of language teaching and learning in Japan. It provides a forum for the exchange of new ideas and techniques and a means of keeping informed about developments in the rapidly changing field of second and foreign language education.

There are currently 31 JALT Chapters, and numerous Special Interest Groups (SIGs) throughout Japan.

SIGs are made of JALT members who share a professional interest. SIGs publish books, journals, newsletters and maintain informative mailing lists. SIGs also hold conferences and seminars, and work with JALT Chapters and other groups to put on events throughout Japan.

For more information about the types of SIGs available and what they are getting up to, please follow the QR code for more information.





TOCHIGI

