

Professor: Jennifer Carr

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Office Hours: Th 2–4

H&SS 8037

1 Overview

Language is a phenomenon in the natural world that can be approached scientifically, by studying language usage patterns, human language apprehension and cognition, visual and auditory perception of language, and formal mathematical models of the structure and interpretation of well-formed linguistic expressions. This course will examine the theoretical foundations of the linguistic sciences. The most foundational question within philosophy of language is: *how is it that an object in the world can have meaning?* From there, we build outward: how do words have meanings? How do sentences have meanings, and how are their meanings related to words' meanings? How does communication work? We will work through classic papers in philosophy of language on central topics of meaning, truth, reference, names, descriptions, natural kind terms, conversational implicatures, presuppositions, interpretation, and indeterminacy.

Readings: All readings will be available on the course website. There is no textbook. (You're welcome.)

Advice: This class will not be an easy A or even an easy B. The material we'll be studying is conceptually demanding. Learning to use certain formal tools will be necessary for gaining a clear understanding of the philosophical questions this class focuses on. In order to do well in this class, you will need to:

- do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and preferably again afterward;
- attend class consistently, missing no more than two sessions;
- work hard to understand and think critically about the theories under discussion; and
- ask questions when you're confused about something. (Even if you think the answer might be obvious to other students. Even if you think your question was already answered in class, but you accidentally tuned out the answer.)

2 Assignments

- Exam 1: 22%
- Exam 2: 22%
- Exam 3: 28%
- Biweekly online reading responses: 16%
- In-class discussion and clicker participation: 12%

Exams: There will be two take-home midterm exams and one in-class exam during finals week. Both midterm exams must be submitted on the course website and will be open-book. The final exam will be conducted in class and will be closed-book and closed-notes. The exams will include both long- and short-answer questions.

Online reading responses: The course website contains a discussion board. There will be separate posts for each day's readings.

- Each Monday and Wednesday at least 1 hour **before class**, students must post a reading response with comments or questions about the day’s readings (at least **five sentences**). Your posts may start a new thread or may be a response to other students’ comments and questions.
- Reading responses **must engage carefully with the content** of the reading. If you ask a question, explain why you’re confused about that question and what some possible answers might be. If you make a comment, it shouldn’t be merely evaluative. (Not merely: “I liked this reading. It was really interesting. I’d been wondering about epistemic closure.”)
- If your reading responses make it obvious that you haven’t done the reading—for example, by asking some question about the beginning of the reading that was addressed at great length later in the reading—you will not receive credit.

Posts are graded pass/fail. Late reading responses will not be accepted. These reading responses will be used to structure Friday discussions. Your reading responses may at any point be read aloud and discussed.

In-class discussion: You’ll be expected to participate in discussion in every session. This includes small group discussions, full-class discussions, and frequent low-stakes cold-calling. Because this class is discussion-based, any more than **two** absences from lecture or section will result in a reduction of your in-class grade, except in special circumstances. If you think your circumstances warrant more than two absences, please contact me before each further class that you miss and be prepared to provide documentation.

3 Policies

Laptop/tablet/phone policy: Use of laptops, tablets, and phones won’t be permitted in class, except in special cases. Contact me for permission if you have specific reasons why you will need to use any of these devices.¹

Email policy: Email me before each class that you miss. If you’d like to ask detailed philosophical questions, please come to my office hours!

Syllabus policy: To ensure that students are aware of all course requirements and policies, there will be a required syllabus review quiz on the course website. You must pass this test with a perfect score by Monday, Oct 9, at 5:00pm. You may consult the syllabus while taking the test and you may retake the test as many times as necessary to get a perfect score.

4 Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with [university policies](#) on plagiarism, cheating, and academic integrity. Note: “plagiarism,” in academic contexts, is defined very broadly. It includes any presentation of others’ ideas without proper attribution, even paraphrased, even from informal resources (websites, conversation with your roommate, ...).

¹ Justification: Undergraduates who use laptops in lecture spend 40% of their time using non-course-related software. Academic performance is inversely correlated with multitasking on laptops. Even controlling for multitasking, students who take notes on laptops show reduced comprehension, in short and medium-term examination, compared with students who take notes by hand. Most importantly: being seated near someone using a screen to multitask impedes academic performance. See Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014), “The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science*; Kraushaar & Novak (2010), “Examining the Affects of Student Multitasking with Laptops during the Lecture,” *Journal of Information Systems Education*; Sanaa, Weston, Cepedab (2013), “Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers,” *Computers & Education*.

Note also that plagiarism need not be knowing or intentional to be penalizable. *Always err on the side of citing any sources that have influenced your thinking.* The specific citation format you use isn't important, as long as it includes the standard identifying materials.

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be reported immediately. Penalties for academic integrity infractions may include failing the assignment, failing the course, suspension, and expulsion.

5 Tentative schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Week 1 is Oct. 2–6; you can figure out the rest. Tuesday readings are listed first after each week number; Thursday readings are listed second.

I Foundations

Week 1

Hempel, "Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes"

Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"

Week 2

Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics"

Grice, "Meaning"

Week 3

Lewis, "Languages and Language"

Lewis continued

Midterm exam 1 due Saturday, Oct. 21, at 5:00pm.

II Semantics

Week 4

Frege, "On Sense and Nominatum"

Frege continued

Week 5

Russell, "On Denoting"

Kripke, "Naming and Necessity"

Week 6

Putnam, "Meaning and Reference"

Chomsky, "Language from an Internalist Perspective," 146–156

Midterm exam 2 due Saturday, Nov. 11, at 5:00pm.

III Pragmatics

Week 7

Grice, "Logic and Conversation"

Stalnaker, "Assertion"

Week 8

Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"

IV Linguistic indeterminacy

Week 9

Quine, "Translation and Meaning"

Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning"

Week 10

Kripke, "On Rules and Private Language"

Millikan, "Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein paradox"
