

PHIL 134: Philosophy of Language

Spring 2025, Tues/Thurs 2-3:20 PM, RWAC 0426

Instructor Contact

Dr. Rachel Rudolph

Email: rrudolph@ucsd.edu

Office hours: Monday 11–12:30, or by appointment

Office hours location: RWAC 0443, or Zoom by request

You can reach me by email, Canvas message or by coming to office hours. Don't expect email responses after 6 PM or on weekends and holidays. While I will often reply more quickly, please allow one working day for email responses.

Course Description

Language is something we are constantly surrounded by and intimately familiar with. We learn it almost effortlessly at a young age, and use it in highly complex ways, usually without thinking much about it. We will start off this class by looking at what make something a language, and what we know when we know one. Then, we will cover four central topics from analytic philosophy of language:

(1) Reference: Our words refer to things in the world. For instance, the word “water” in English refers to the substance H₂O when it is in liquid form. How is the reference of our words determined? Is it determined by individuals' psychological states? Do the external environment and broader society also play a role?

(2) Sentence Meaning: In communication, we tend to make utterances of complete sentences. Perhaps rather than focusing on the meaning of individual words, as we did in the previous unit, we would do better to focus on the meaning of full sentences. We will look at three approaches to sentence meaning: in terms of communicative intentions, truth conditions, and communal use.

(3) Semantics and Pragmatics: Speakers often communicate more than the literal meaning of their utterance. If someone you're on the phone with says, “It's getting late”, they probably don't just want to inform you about what time it is. In this unit, we will discuss the difference between literal meaning, or *semantics*, and the additional information that is communicated *pragmatically*.

(4) Linguistic Relativity: This final unit will combine philosophy of language with linguistics and psychology. Does the language we speak affect our experience of the world around us? We will discuss and evaluate more and less extreme versions of views that answer “yes” to this question.

Course Materials

There is no textbook for our class. All readings will be made available on Canvas. Lecture slides will be posted on Canvas after class meetings.

Evaluation

In-class quizzes	30%
Midterm 1 (Thursday, April 24)	20%
Midterm 2 (Thursday, May 22)	20%
Final essay (due Tuesday, June 10, 6 PM)	20%
Classroom engagement and attendance	10%

- **Quizzes:** Every 1–2 weeks, there will be a short in-class quiz. It will usually contain 3–5 multiple choice or T/F questions and will take at most 10 minutes to complete. Quizzes will be announced at least one week in advance on Canvas. In-class quizzes may sometimes be given at the start of a class meeting and cover the reading that was assigned for that day. *One quiz will be dropped from your final grade.*
- **Midterms:** Midterms will take place in class on Thursday, April 24 and Thursday, May 22. They will consist of some short answer and paragraph response questions. The paragraph response questions will be circulated at least one week ahead of time.
- **Final essay:** A final essay of approximately 5 pages (12 point font, double spaced) will be due on Tuesday, June 10, 6 PM. Essay prompts and instructions will be posted by the end of week 8. A portion of your final essay credit may come from some in-class work that will contribute towards the final product.
- **Classroom engagement and attendance:** This assignment is an extra incentive to be present and engaged in class. You will have one “free” unexcused absence, no questions asked (but cannot be used the days of the midterms!). Beyond that, you will be docked 5% on this grade component for each unexcused absence. For an excused absence, you should email me as soon as you know you have to miss class, and no later than a week after the class was missed. It is always your responsibility to figure out what work you missed when you are absent (excused or unexcused), though I am happy to help if you email me or stop by office hours.

Your attendance and class engagement grade may also depend on your participation in some in-class exercises and discussion activities throughout the quarter.

Note that a class may count as an “absence” if you are physically present, but otherwise disengaged, e.g., by being on your phone or sleeping. Other forms of negative participation, which can also affect your grade, include: arriving late or leaving early without justification, using electronic devices for anything unrelated to the class, and being disruptive.

Disagreement about topics we discuss is to be expected, but all comments should be made with respect towards our fellow class members, and with a constructive attitude.

Recording lectures and class discussions is not allowed without consent of the instructor.

Due dates and times for all assignments will be posted on Canvas. It is your responsibility to keep track of them, and to read all Canvas messages and announcements.

Policy on Late or Missed Work

If you miss an in-class quiz, either through your free absence or for an approved excuse, and you do not want to use your drop, you should email me as soon as possible and no later than a week after the missed quiz. As long as the absence is free or excused, you will be eligible for a make-up quiz that will be scheduled for a later date. The make-up quiz will likely be different from the quiz you missed. Missed quizzes for unapproved absences beyond your free absence will receive a grade of 0.

All students must be in attendance for the in-class midterms. Make-ups will only be offered in the case of an unavoidable documented absence.

For the final essay, I will consider extension requests up to Friday of exam week as long as you ask in writing before the essay due date. Late essays without an extension will result in -5% per day late. Final essays will not be accepted later than the Friday of exam week.

If something comes up that is preventing you from participating in class and completing your work for an extended period of time, you should get in touch with me as soon as possible. *I want everyone to succeed in our class, and it's much easier to address issues the earlier they are brought to my attention!*

Technology in the Classroom

During our class meetings, phones should be on silent and put away. This helps everyone focus and improves the quality of discussion. If I see you on your phone, I will issue one warning. After that, being on your phone in class will count against your attendance grade. If there are special circumstances that make this difficult, please talk to me about it.

Laptop and tablet use in class is discouraged and must be only for consulting the class readings or taking notes. Taking notes by hand is much better for learning and helps prevent distraction to yourself and others. Lecture slides will be posted on Canvas, so you shouldn't feel the need to copy down all the material they contain. Using electronic devices in class for non-class purposes will count against your attendance grade.

Academic Honesty and AI

The UC San Diego Academic Integrity Policy (senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/Appendices/2) applies to this class. Violations will be reported to the

Academic Integrity Office.

In completing your work for our class, you may consult sources, use artificial intelligence tools (see below for details), and discuss your ideas with others. However, the work you submit must be your own and you must acknowledge your use of outside sources. In class, I will review how you should cite your sources in your final essay. Note that the final essay can be successfully completed using only the material assigned in our class.

AI Policy: Allowed Within Limits You may use ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence tools as *aides* in your work for our class. While AI tools can help with your writing process, it cannot replace the insight and unique perspective you bring to your assignments. AI should be seen as a writing assistant rather than primary author. It can be fruitfully employed for brainstorming, refining language, or structuring content. However, *the core substance of your written work should be your own*. Always use your own independent judgment when considering AI outputs. AI-generated text can sound compelling and authoritative, but that doesn't guarantee its correctness. AI is notorious for "hallucinating" (i.e., making stuff up), so it's crucial to check any information it provides. You should also always avoid sharing sensitive or private information when using these tools.

If any of your submitted writing seems to be overly reliant on AI-generated text, I will schedule a meeting with you where we will discuss your work.

The purpose of assignments in our class is to help you deepen your understanding of and explore the material assigned in our class. Thus, written work that fails to engage adequately with our assigned reading will receive a lower grade. Additionally, any submitted work that includes the phrase "as a large language model" (or anything similar that shows that you have simply copied AI-generated text directly without giving your own input) will automatically receive no credit and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office.

If you have any questions about academic honesty, don't hesitate to ask me. I would *much* rather answer any questions about this ahead of time, than have to go through academic honesty violations proceedings — and, trust me, so would you!

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability should provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter (paper or electronic) issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>). Students are required to discuss accommodation arrangements with instructors and OSD liaisons in the department *in advance* of any exams or assignments.

Resources

- Food Support for Students: If you are skipping and stretching meals, or having difficulties affording or accessing food, you may be eligible for CalFresh, California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, that can provide up to \$292 a month in free money on a debit card to buy food. Students can apply at benefitscal.com/r/ucsandiegocalfresh
- The Hub Basic Needs Center empowers all students by connecting them to resources for food, stable housing and financial literacy: basicneeds.ucsd.edu
- Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.ucsd.edu/> or (858) 534-3755
- CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center offers free and confidential services for students, staff and faculty impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking. <https://care.ucsd.edu/> or (858) 534-5793.
- Office for the Prevention of Harassment & Discrimination (OPHD) is the Title IX office at UC San Diego. They are responsible for receiving and conducting the administrative investigation of all reports of sex offenses, sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation filed on campus. <https://ophd.ucsd.edu/> or (858) 534-8298.
- Office of Academic Support & Instructional Services (OASIS) provides free tutoring, workshops, mentoring, and other resources: <https://oasis.ucsd.edu/>
- Teaching + Learning Commons provides free tutoring, writing support, and supplemental instruction: <https://commons.ucsd.edu/>

If you are facing difficulties and are unsure where to look, you can always get in touch with me and I'll help connect you with resources.

Schedule

Subject to change. Any changes will be announced on Canvas.

Week 1

- *Tuesday*: Introduction / What is language?
 - Course syllabus
 - Pinker 1999, *Words and Rules* Chapter 1, “The Infinite Library”
- *Thursday*: Mill’s theory of names [**Unit 1: Reference**]
 - Mill 1843, “Of Names”

Week 2

- *Tuesday*: Frege’s descriptivism about reference [**Quiz 1**]
 - Frege 1892, “On sense and reference” (selection)
- *Thursday*: Kripke’s critique of descriptivism
 - Kripke 1972, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture 1

Week 3

- *Tuesday*: Kripke’s causal externalism
 - Kripke 1972, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture 2
- *Thursday*: Putnam’s social externalism [**Quiz 2**]
 - Putnam 1973, “Meaning and reference”

Week 4

- *Tuesday*: Catch-up and review
- *Thursday*: **In-class midterm 1**

Week 5

- *Tuesday*: Meaning and communicative intentions [**Unit 2: Sentence Meaning**]
 - Grice 1957, “Meaning”
- *Thursday*: Verification and truth conditions [**Quiz 3**]
 - Lycan 2008, selection from Chapters 8–9

Week 6

- *Tuesday*: Skepticism about meaning
 - Davidson 1986, “A nice derangement of epitaphs”
- *Thursday*: Meaning as use [**Quiz 4**]
 - Wittgenstein 1953, *Philosophical Investigations*, Sections 1–43

Week 7

- *Tuesday*: Speech acts [**Unit 3: Semantics and Pragmatics**]
 - Austin 1961, “Performative utterances”
- *Thursday*: Implicature and entailment [**Quiz 5**]
 - Grice 1975, “Logic and conversation” (selection)
 - Savage, et al 2019, “Pragmatic implication”

Week 8

- *Tuesday*: Catch-up and review
- *Thursday*: **In-class midterm 2**

Week 9

- *Tuesday*: Linguistic relativity, the extreme version [**Unit 4: Linguistic Relativity**]
 - Deutscher 2010, *Through the Language Glass*, selection from Chapter 6, “Crying Whorf”
 - Whorf 1940, “Science and Linguistics” (selection)
 - Orwell 1948, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “Appendix: The principles of Newspeak”
- *Thursday*: Linguistic relativity, the moderate version
 - Deutscher 2010, *Through the Language Glass*, selection from Chapters 6–7
 - Boroditsky 2006, “Linguistic Relativity”

Week 10

- *Tuesday*: Application to gender in language [**Quiz 6**]
 - Dembroff and Wodak 2021, “How much gender is too much gender?”
- *Thursday*: Conclusion and essay work