



Introduction to Linguistic Theory

01:615:201:01

Spring 2026

Last updated January 16, 2026

Course format	fully in-person
Course meeting	Mondays, Thursdays 10:20 am–11:40 am Hardenbergh Hall –B6
Course website	canvas.rutgers.edu (INTRO TO LING THEORY 01:615:201:01) github site to be updated
Instructor	Merlin Balihaxi
Email	merlin.udinov@rutgers.edu
Office hours	Wednesdays 10:00 am–11:00 am (in person or on Zoom) Room 003 (basement), 18 Seminary Pl (the Linguistics Building)

1 Course description

This course is an introduction to the study of linguistics and contemporary linguistic theory. Linguistics is a broad term that encompasses basically anything having to do with the scientific study of human language. Linguists use mathematical systems (often called "formal systems") to develop precise theories that help us understand the cognitive processes that allow us to use language to communicate with each other, conduct an internal monologue, and so much more.

In this course, we will focus on several key areas of modern linguistic theory: **morphology** (the study of words and word formation), **syntax** (the study of how sentences and phrases are built and structured), **semantics** (the study of how words and phrases are associated with meaning), **pragmatics** (the study of implied meaning and language use in context), **phonetics** and **phonology** (the study of "speech sounds", broadly — scare quotes because we can also study the phonetics and phonology of signed languages!).

course learning goals

At the completion of this course, students will be able to

- understand significant sub-fields within linguistics;
- understand, create, and manipulate representations and analyses in phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, phonetics, and phonology.

department learning goals met by this course

- Students will reason about language; identify how incorrect or irrational assumptions and prejudices distort understanding of language; demonstrate knowledge about language in the world including a sophisticated understanding of linguistic and cultural variation, and evaluate popular views on the nature of human languages and their speakers.
- Majors and Minors will also demonstrate technical mastery over the tools of linguistic analysis in syntax, phonology, and semantics and apply linguistic theory in these areas. They will investigate linguistic data and analyze it; demonstrate strong problem-solving skills; extend their understanding of theoretical linguistics into other domains of linguistic research; apply the techniques of linguistics that they have learned in the core courses to new topics; and access current research in the field. Some students will investigate language in a broader context, where it can be systematically and rationally explored using their sophisticated understanding how language works.

This course has been approved as a Core Curriculum Course and satisfies the following Core Curriculum learning goals: (i) understand the nature of human languages and their speakers [AHq]; (ii) apply effective and efficient mathematical or other formal processes to reason and to solve problems [QR]. For the learning goals of the Core Curriculum, please visit <https://shorturl.at/eygjl>.



2 Requirements and grading

2.1 readings

Readings should be completed before the class for which they are assigned. There is **no textbook required** for this course. All readings will be posted as pdf files on Canvas and will come from the following sources:

- Anderson, C. 2018. *Essentials of Linguistics*. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/essentialsoflinguistics/>
- Carnie, A. 2006. *Syntax: A generative introduction* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- Department of Linguistics. 2011. *Language files: Materials for an introduction to language and linguistics* (11th ed.). The Ohio State University Press.
- Griffiths, P., Cummins, C. 2017. *An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Hayes, B., Curtiss, S., Szabolcsi, A., Stowell, T., Stabler, E., Sportiche, D., Koopman, H., Keating, P., Munro, P., Hyams, N., Steriade, D. 2000. *Linguistics: An introduction to Linguistic Theory* (V. Fromkin, Ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- O’Grady, W., Dobrovolsky, M., and Aronoff, M. (Eds.). 1997. *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction* (3rd ed.). St. Martin’s Press.

2.2 grading

grading breakdown	letter grades
10%: Attendance and participation	A $\geq 90\%$
50%: 8 assignments (lowest 2 dropped)	B+ 85–89.9%
20%: Midterm exam	B 80–84.9%
20%: Final exam	C+ 75–79.9%
	C 70–74.9%
	D 60–69.9%
	F $\leq 59.9\%$

Attendance and participation account for 10% of the final grade. You will be graded based on your overall level of participation in class. Participation includes: attendance, answering questions raised in class, asking questions, participating in in-class exercises. You are expected to attend all classes, and that includes arriving before class begins. Frequent and unexcused absences will substantially lower your attendance & participation grade, and will likely make it difficult for you to succeed in the course.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for:

- Going through the materials for any classes you missed before the next class and completing any assignments in a timely manner. (If you need an extension, you must ask for one separately and ahead of time.)
- Using the University absence reporting website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra>) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to the instructor. Any reported absence will result in a decrease in your Attendance/Participation grade, based on the following scale:

Unreported absences	Penalty (out of 10 pts)
14+	50% deduction
8+	30%
4+	10%

- University policy excuses absences due to religious observance or participation in Rutgers-approved activities, and permits students to make up work missed for these circumstances. You must notify me and your section instructor in advance if this applies to you.

Assignments: There will be 8 assignments, which make up 50% of your final grade.

- The lowest 2 scores will be dropped (in other words, 6 out of 8 assignments will count towards your grade).

- **Late Policy** If you think you will not be able to complete an assignment on time, please contact the instructor **before the deadline** to request an extension. Without an agreed-upon extension, any assignment turned in late will have its grade lowered by 5% for each 24 hour period it is late, up to a maximum reduction of 50%.
- All assignments will be posted on the Canvas sites one week before they are due. See the schedule below for the exact deadlines.
- You should type your answers and upload your assignment on Canvas as a **single** .pdf file. .docx, or .gdoc files, scans of handwritten assignments, and annotations to the question file are not accepted. (For the syntax assignments, you may draw the trees by hand and scan them. But please make sure to compile them into one .pdf file instead of multiple pictures.)
- Collaboration is allowed, but **each student must turn in their own assignment**. Please indicate at the top of your assignment whom you worked with.
- Using AI (ChatGPT etc.) is **NOT** allowed for any section in any assignment. You will earn a **zero** for using AI.

Exams: Each exam will be worth 20% of the final grade.

- The midterm exam will be given during our regularly scheduled class time on March 5th (in the same classroom). You will have all class period to complete the midterm.
- The final will be during the scheduled time for finals given out by the university and it is **NOT** cumulative.
- The exams will consist of questions based on data sets, short answer and fill in the blank/multiple choice questions.

Extra credit: Up to **2%** of extra credit can be earned by participating in research studies conducted by members of the Linguistics Department. These studies usually consist of experiments that take 25–45 minutes.

- Experiments are offered through the Linguistics department experiment management system (SONA): <http://rutgerslinguistics.sona-systems.com/> . Towards the beginning of the semester, your name and email will be added to the experiment system. You will be issued an anonymous ID to participate in experiments through this system. Once Linguistics experiments are posted, you can sign up online. Note that this system is different from the psychology pool, and you should not use a psychology ID to log in to the system.
- Any student enrolled in a Linguistics undergraduate course is eligible to participate in Linguistics experiments, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, language status, or impairments, disorders, or disabilities (as long as his/her instructor provides the opportunity). You cannot be denied participation for any of these reasons.
- You are highly recommended to join these research studies.

3 Other specifics

Academic integrity: It's unethical and unacceptable to pass off anyone else's work as your own. Take a moment to review the university's Academic Integrity policy: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.

Use of AI (ChatGPT etc.) is **NOT** allowed in assignments.

Students with disabilities: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities in all of its educational programs. To be considered for reasonable accommodations, students must contact the disability services office at their home campus, complete an intake interview, and provide appropriate documentation (see guidelines here: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>). If the request is approved, the office will issue a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS website at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Respect for diversity: It is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. Coercive, intimidating, harassing, abusive, derogatory or prejudicial actions or speech will not be accepted in this class. Please don't hesitate to let me know of any concerns you might have, or ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

If you experience or witness an act of bias or hate, report it to someone in authority. You may file a report online and you will be contacted within 24 hours. The bias reporting page is here: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?RutgersUniv&layout_id=25

Bias is defined by the University as an act, verbal, written, physical, psychological, that threatens, or harms a person or group on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, atypical heredity or cellular blood trait, military service or veteran status.

4 Useful resources

- **Rutgers Learning Centers:** <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>
- **Academic Advising for SAS students:** <https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/advising/advising>
- **Student Success resources:** <https://success.rutgers.edu/>
- **Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)**
(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professionals within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community, and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

- **Report a Concern:** <http://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help/>
- **Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)**
 (848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
<http://vpva.rutgers.edu>

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

5 Tentative schedule

Week	Dates	Monday class	Thursday class	Sunday homework
01	Jan 19, Jan 22	—	Introduction	
02	Jan 26, Jan 29	Linguistics as a science	Morphology I	
03	Feb 02, Feb 05	Morphology II	Morphology III	
04	Feb 09, Feb 12	Morphology IV	Syntax I	HW1 Morphology
05	Feb 16, Feb 19	Syntax II	Syntax III	HW2 Syntax (1)
06	Feb 23, Feb 26	Syntax IV	Review	HW3 Syntax (2)
07	Mar 02, Mar 05	Midterm Review	MIDTERM EXAM	
08	Mar 09, Mar 12	Semantics I	Semantics II	
SPRING RECESS				
10	Mar 23, Mar 26	Semantics III	Semantics IV	HW4 Semantics
11	Mar 30, Apr 02	Pragmatics I	Pragmatics II	HW5 Pragmatics
12	Apr 06, Apr 09	Phonetics I	Phonetics II	
13	Apr 13, Apr 16	Phonetics III	Phonetics IV	HW6 Phonetics
14	Apr 20, Apr 23	Phonology I	Phonology II	HW7 Phonology (1)
15	Apr 27, Apr 30	Phonology III	Phonology IV	HW8 Phonology (2)
16	May 04	Wrap-up	—	
	TBA	FINAL EXAM		