

# Syntax

// Syllabus Fall 2016 (updated 8/26)

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Professor: Dan Parker  
Email: [dparker@wm.edu](mailto:dparker@wm.edu)  
Office: Tucker Hall 036

Class location: Tucker 222  
Class time: MWF 9:00 – 9:50 AM  
Office Hours: W 1-3 | R 12-2 | F 11-12 | by appt.

## What this course is about

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This is a full semester, introductory course on *syntax*. Syntax is the study of the rules and representations that underlie sentence formation. That's pretty abstract, without further clarification, but the course builds on what you learned about syntax in 220. As a linguistics course, our goal is to better understand the human language capacity. Our ability to produce and comprehend language involves the ability to relate words to extract meaning, and syntax is where that happens. What we'll do in this course is examine a range of data, and on the basis of that data, develop and test different hypotheses about what a theory of syntax must include.

The basic workflow:

1. Fundamentals
2. Investigate
3. Develop a theory
4. Break the theory (when we break theories, we learn something)
5. Try to fix our theory ("Band-Aids don't fix bullet holes" ~ Taylor Swift)
6. Break it again
7. Lather, rinse, repeat until we run out of time.

## Course objectives

This course will offer something for everyone. It is designed to develop your analytical and data-oriented problem solving skills, which you can generalize to fields outside of linguistics.

*Lower-order (discipline specific) skills:*

- Develop an understanding of the structures and operations underlying sentence formation
- Develop an understanding of the goals and methods of syntactic analysis

*Higher-order (non-discipline specific) skills*

- Foster and develop pattern recognition and data-oriented problem solving skills
- Learn to examine data, and formulate a coherent, logical argument

## Textbook & Readings

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- **Required text:** Syntax 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. by Andrew Carnie. Wiley. ISBN: 9780470655313
- The textbook is a resource. It's not the definitive word on syntax. There'll be times where we deviate from the text. The textbook will supplement course lectures, not replace them.
- Some of you will find it better for your learning to read the text before the lectures. Some of you will find it better to read the text after the lectures. None of you will get anywhere if you don't read the text. I'll leave it to you to decide which approach works best for you.

**Evaluation: What you'll have to do to succeed in this course**

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You are responsible for your own learning. My role is to engage you in this specific topic, syntax, and to guide you in expanding your educational and intellectual interests. I make a number of learning opportunities available to you in the form of lectures, discussions, and assignments, and exams. Your grade will be based on the calculations below

**Grade Calculation**

Assignments	50%
Midterm:	25%
Final exam:	25%

**Grade scale**

A	94-100	C+	77-79	D-	60-62
A-	90-93	C	73-76	F	0-59
B+	87-89	C-	70-72		
B	83-86	D+	67-69		
B-	80-82	D	63-66		

**Assignments:** We'll have a range of problem sets distributed throughout the semester, roughly one a week. Due dates will vary depending on the complexity of the assignment, but most of the time you'll have a week to complete the assignment.

**Midterm and final:** The midterm will cover material up the mid-semester. Final is cumulative in the sense that it builds on material discussed in the first half of the semester.

**How to succeed with these requirements:** If you want the maximum benefit from this class, i.e., learn lots and have a grade to show for it in the end, I recommend that you take an active approach to your learning. Come to class regularly, be attentive, ask questions in class, and regularly seek clarification or further discussion with me in office hours.

**Policies and Guidelines**

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**Attendance:** Success in this course is predicated on the concept of regular class attendance. When you miss class, you miss out on important details, changes to the syllabus, and new assignments, not to mention the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the course material. You miss the chance to ask questions, learn from your peers, and show me where we may need to slow down, speed up, or retrace particular steps.

Sometimes you will need to miss class. That is understandable, to a certain point. If your (lack of) attendance becomes an issue, I'll let you know. If you need to miss class, don't ask me if you missed anything, because the answer will always be 'yes'. Get the notes from a classmate, review them. After you've reviewed the notes from class, I'm happy to clarify, discuss, and answer questions about the material you missed.

**Assignments:** I encourage you to discuss the assignments and solutions with your peers. But all assignments must be completed individually. If you discussed the work with another student, mention that at the top of the assignment. Assignments are due at the start of class.

**Late submissions:** If you want me to provide an extension on an assignment, talk to me ASAP (the earlier, the better). If you need to miss class on the day an assignment is due, and you want me to accept a late submission, you need to offer something in good faith the day the assignment is due. Scanned/photographed notes showing that you've been working on the problem or discussions with me about the assignment in office hours before the due date will be sufficient. Otherwise, I do not accept late submissions.

**Technology in the classroom:** I'm not responsible if you missed something because you were distracted by technology—you're responsible for your own learning. But I am responsible for establishing a classroom environment where others can learn free from distraction. If you prevent me from fulfilling that responsibility, I'll make it clear.

**Accommodations:** Any student who needs accommodation is requested to consult with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as early as possible. I will follow the recommendations from SAS, and all discussions, issues, concerns, and accommodations will remain confidential.

**Honor Code:** "As a member of the William and Mary Community, I pledge on my honor not to lie, cheat, or steal, either in my academic or personal life. I understand that such acts violate the Honor Code and undermine the community of trust, of which we are all stewards." More information about the W&M Honor Code can be found on the W&M website.

**Updates:** This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the professor. You will be notified of any changes to the course in a timely manner. Check blackboard for the current syllabus.

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## Schedule

### Topics

8/24 – 8/26	Introduction
8/29 – 9/2	Categories (Carnie, chapters 1-2)
9/5 – 9/9	Towards a grammar (Chomsky reading on BB)
9/12 – 9/23	Towards a better grammar: Rule-based approaches (Carnie, chapter 3)
9/26 – 11/11	Structural relations: Binding Theory & X-Bar Theory (Carnie, chapters 4-7)
11/14 – 12/2	Movement (Carnie, chapters 9-11)

### Important dates

- **Add/Drop Ends:** September 2
- **Fall Break:** October 8-11
- **Midterm:** Wednesday October 12, in-class
- **Thanksgiving Break:** November 23-27
- **Last day of class:** Friday December 2
- **Final:** Friday December 9, 9-12 noon