

## The Role of Language in Thought and Behavior (Psyc 461-004), Spring 2007

*Time:* Tue / Thur 3:00 - 4:15p  
*Location:* Krug Hall 242  
*Instructors:* Brandon Beltz *Email:* bbeltz@gmu.edu  
Daragh Sibley *Email:* dsibley@gmu.edu  
*Phone:* (703) 993-1207  
*Office:* David King Hall 2061  
*Office hours:* Tue 1:30 - 2:30 p.m., or by appointment

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**Course Description:** This course will examine the role that language plays in human thought and behavior. We will approach this issue by addressing several important questions such as: What is language? How do social scientists study language? How is language processed in the brain? How is the ability to use language tied to other important areas such as memory, intelligence, and emotion? By the end of the course you should have a deeper appreciation for the fundamental role language plays in defining human existence.

**Textbook/ Readings:** There is no required textbook for the course. Weekly readings will be taken from various book chapters and research articles. Most of the readings will be available as electronic pdf files which you can print on your own. Each week, instructions for obtaining future week's readings will be sent by email.

**Course Grading:** Your final grade will be based upon the following areas according to the percentages on the next page.

(1) *Weekly writing assignments:* The purpose of the writing assignments is to encourage you to critically examine the course material and to facilitate class discussion. The assignments should be roughly 2 pages (double spaced) in length. The first page should summarize the previous week's material. You may want to write as if you are explaining the course material to a friend, family member, etc, who was not in class with you. The second page should raise some deeper questions/ issues about the material which you should then attempt to explore.

**Assignments are due in class on the Tuesday of each week!** There will be roughly 10 total (+/- 1) written assignments possible over the semester. You will be responsible for turning in 8 of them for your final grade, which means you can drop 2. Late assignments turned in after class will not be accepted for any reason and will be counted as a dropped assignment.

(2) *Midterm Exam:* The midterm exam will consist of several short essay questions. The purpose will be to gauge how well you are able to synthesize the material from the first half of the course.

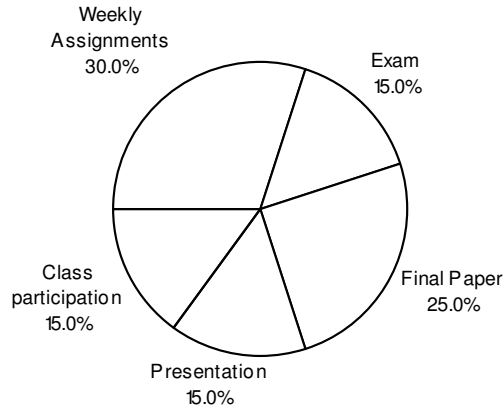
(3) *Final Paper:* The final paper will be on a relevant course topic of your choosing. The length of the paper will be roughly 8-10 pages. Further instructions will be given later in the semester regarding the paper.

(4) *Presentation:* You will give a presentation to the class based on your final paper. The length of the presentation will be roughly 8-10 minutes. Further instructions will be given about the presentation requirements later in the semester,

(5) *Class Participation:* This portion of your grade will reflect your contribution to the class. This will be evaluated partly by your attendance and partly from your thoughtful questions and comments in class. Each week there will be a brief review of the previous week's material. As

part of class participation, students are expected to discuss material from their weekly writing assignments during the review time.

**Final Grade Percentages.**



A	93 – 100 %	B+	87.0 – 89.9 %	C+	77.0 – 79.9 %	D	60.0 – 69.9 %
A-	90.0 - 92.9 %	B	83.0 – 86.9 %	C	73.0 – 76.9 %	F	Below 60.0 %
		B-	80.0 – 82.9 %	C-	70.0 – 72.9 %		

**Honor Code.** All provisions of the GMU Honor Code will be followed in this class. During exams no books, notes, student interactions, or electronic devices will be permitted. Plagiarism of course readings and other student’s work on the weekly writing assignments and final paper will not be tolerated.

**Students with Disabilities.** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please notify the instructors as soon as possible. Also contact the Disability Resource Center at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

**Access to Computers.** Students must have access to their GMU e-mail account. You will receive class updates and notifications through the class email list. If you do not use your GMU email account, be sure to forward emails from that account to another account you use regularly.

**Last Days to Add/Drop Course.** Last day to add: Feb 6<sup>th</sup> . Last day to drop: Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Course Schedule (Subject to Change):**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Jan 23	Syllabus and introduction
Jan 25	Language and the cognitive revolution
Jan 30	Animal, machine, and human communication
Feb 1	Animal, machine, and human communication
Feb 6	The scientific study of language
Feb 8	The physical forms of language: speech and writing
Feb 13	Words, concepts, and the lexicon
Feb 15	Words, concepts, and the lexicon
Feb 20	Syntax, grammar, and discourse
Feb 22	Language and long term memory
Feb 27	The cognitive neuroscience of language:
Mar 1	Acquired language deficits. Hemispheric specialization
Mar 6	The connection between the mind and brain: computational modeling
Mar 8	<b>Midterm Exam</b>
Mar 13	<i>No Class: Spring Break</i>
Mar 15	<i>No Class: Spring Break</i>
Mar 20	Intro to language acquisition
Mar 22	Language acquisition
Mar 27	The linguistic relativity hypotheses (Sapir-Whorf)
Mar 29	The linguistic relativity hypotheses (Sapir-Whorf)
Apr 3	Embodied cognition <b>Submit paper topic ideas</b>
Apr 5	The effects of language on reasoning
Apr 10	The effects of language on decision making
Apr 12	Individual differences in language: intelligence, gender, etc
Apr 17	Individual differences in language: personality, emotion
Apr 19	The application of language research; technology, careers, etc <b>Final Paper Due</b>
Apr 24	Lecture overflow/ Student selected topics/ Presentation primer
Apr 26	<b>Final Presentations</b>
May 1	<b>Final Presentations</b>
May 3	<b>Final Presentations</b>
May 15	Open Discussion <i>Official Final Exam Time (1:30 to 4:15)</i>