

PHIL 364 | SECTION 01 | FALL 2014 | HUNTER COLLEGE  
**PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE**  
TAUGHT BY DANIEL HARRIS | TUESDAY+FRIDAY | 2:10-3:25

course website: [danielwharris.com/teaching/364/](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/364/)

office: 1418HW    hours: T+F 1:00-2:00 or by appointment

### ABOUT THE COURSE

Language has been one of the central topics in philosophy for more than a century. In this course, we'll introduce ourselves to the philosophical study of language by considering some of the influential ways that philosophers have answered the question, *What is language?* According to some of the theories we'll consider, language is:

- a system of symbols
- a way of acting
- a tool for communication
- a medium of thought
- a cognitive structure
- a means for creative expression
- a social building block
- an expression of cultural identity

These answers aren't mutually exclusive, and each one captures something important about the nature of language and how we should understand it and its role in human life.

It's far from obvious how all of the theories that have accompanied these answers should fit together, and so the overarching theme of the course will be the multifacetedness of language: how does language play all of the roles that it plays in our lives?

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Short Papers: 40%

Term Paper: 35%

Office Visit: 10%

Exam: 15%

### WEEKLY SHORT PAPERS

You'll hand in a short (~250-400 word) essay at the start of class each Tuesday. Each of these will be graded on a pass-fail basis. In each paper, you will give a single argument concerning some point raised the previous week. You have two options:

- Object to an idea defended in one of the readings.
- Defend the reading against an objection raised in class.

These short papers will be worth 40% of your overall grade. I will calculate your final score on them as follows:

$$\text{score} = 40 \times \frac{\text{\# of short essays passed (up to 10)}}{10}$$

You'll have a chance to hand in as many as 14 short essays. This means that you can fail or miss up to four essays during the semester before your grade will be harmed. I recommend that you save these freebies for when you need them.

You have very limited space in these short essays. Focus on making a single argument that is clear, concise, and convincing. Make sure that every word in your essay plays some role in making this argument better.

### TERM PAPER

Your term paper should be a sustained defense of a single philosophical thesis about language, and should be about 2000-2500 words long. I'll have some suggestions about topics, but you're also free to choose your own. Either way, you should consult with me about your topic.

In addition to having read all of the relevant required readings for class, you'll be responsible for understanding some of other philosophical literature that's relevant to your topic. This means that you should research what authors other than those we've read in class have to say about a topic. There is no specific number of works you need to cite, but you should talk to me about whether you've covered enough of the bases during your office visit.

## OFFICE VISIT

At least two weeks before handing in your term paper, you should come to my office to pitch your paper topic to me. You should bring the following things to this meeting:

- A typed-up short summary of your paper, including your thesis and a summary of your main argument. This may be in point form, but should be clear and well-thought-out.
- A list of at least three sources from the scholarly literature that are relevant to your topic.

You should come prepared to answer a few questions about your paper. The purpose of this meeting is not to test your knowledge of the topic before the paper is written. Rather, its purpose is to encourage you to get started on the paper early, to help make sure that you've chosen a suitable topic, and to point you in the direction of the relevant philosophical literature. I may make some suggestions about how to focus the paper topic, or about additional things you should read. The whole thing should take less than 15 minutes.

## FINAL EXAM

The final exam will consist of short essays on topics we cover in class. You'll have a choice of questions to answer, and I will share the questions with you at least a few days in advance.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

If all goes well, here's what will happen this semester:

- You'll learn about some central philosophical questions about language and the ways that some influential philosophers have tried to answer them.
- You'll get better at thinking like a philosopher. This means thinking clearly about hard questions, taking a rationally critical attitude toward your own and others' answers to those questions, and being willing to go where the best reasons and arguments lead.
- You'll get better at reading like a philosopher. This means identifying what's important and controversial in an author's claims, distinguishing between rational and irrational support for those claims, and noticing the weak spots in their arguments.
- You'll get better at writing like a philosopher. This means being clear about what you're trying to say, giving the best possible rational support for your claims, and anticipating the objections of those who disagree.
- Since these ways of thinking, reading, and writing are useful for dealing with issues outside philosophy, you'll gain some skills that you can use in other courses, and in your everyday life.

## READINGS AND WEBSITE

All of the required readings will be available on the course website:

[danielwharris.com/teaching/364](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/364)

## HOW TO GET A GOOD GRADE

Getting an A in this course will require you to do all of the following:

- Do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and preferably again afterward.
- Display your interest in and understanding of the weekly readings and discussion in your short essays.
- Regularly engage in class discussion. Visit my office hours or email me if there's something you'd like to talk about more.
- Work hard at understanding and thinking critically about the theories we discuss.
- Learn to write in the clear, concise, and convincingly argumentative style that philosophers prefer.
- Ruthlessly revise and proofread your essays until they are written in clear and grammatical English.

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

## TENTATIVE READING SCHEDULE

Note: this schedule is subject to change. The course website will contain a current version.

	TUESDAYS	FRIDAYS
1		Aug 29 <i>Introduction</i>
2	Sept 2 John Locke: 'Of Words'	Sept 5 John Stuart Mill: 'Of Names'
3	Sept 9* Gottlob Frege: 'On Sense and Reference'	Sept 12 Gottlob Frege: 'On Sense and Reference' (cont.)
4	Sept 16* Irene Heim & Angelika Kratzer: <i>Semantics in Generative Grammar</i> (excerpt)	Sept 19 CLASS CANCELLED
5	Sept 23* Heim & Kratzer: <i>Semantics in Generative Grammar</i> (excerpt)	Sept 26 NO CLASSES CUNY
6	Sept 30* Bertrand Russell: 'On Denoting'	Oct 3 NO CLASSES CUNY
7	Oct 7* Stephen Neale: <i>Descriptions</i> (excerpt)	Oct 10 Saul Kripke: <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (excerpt)
8	Oct 14* Saul Kripke: <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (excerpt) David Kaplan: <i>Demonstratives</i> (excerpt)	Oct 17 David Kaplan: <i>Demonstratives</i> (excerpt)
9	Oct 21* Noam Chomsky: <i>Knowledge of Language</i> (excerpt)	Oct 24 Marc D. Hauser, Noam Chomsky, and W. Tecumeh Fitch: 'The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve?'
10	Oct 28* Ludwig Wittgenstein: <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (excerpt)	Oct 31 J.L. Austin: 'Performative Utterances'
11	Nov 4* John Searle: 'What is a Speech Act?'	Nov 7 H. P. Grice: 'Meaning' P. F. Strawson: 'Intention and Convention in Speech Acts'
12	Nov 11* David Lewis: 'Languages and Language'	Nov 14 Peter Strawson: 'On Referring'
13	Nov 18* Grice: 'Logic and Conversation'	Nov 21 Dan Sperber & Deirdre Wilson: <i>Relevance</i> (excerpt)
14	Nov 25* Elisabeth Camp: 'Metaphor and that Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quois''	Nov 28 THANKSGIVING BREAK
15	Dec 2* Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton: 'Free Speech and Illocution'	Dec 5 Rae Langton: 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts' Jason Stanley: 'Ways of Silencing'
16	Dec 9* George Orwell: 'Politics and the English language' Stephen Pinker: <i>The Language Instinct</i> , ch.12	Dec 12 David Foster Wallace: 'Tense Present'

short essays are due on Tuesdays marked with \*