

# Philosophy of Language

## (Sample Syllabus: Advanced)

**Instructor:** Minji Jang (*she/they*)

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**Office:** Caldwell 206A

**Office Hours:** MW 11:00am-12:00pm and by appointment

### Content Warning

Some of the topics and materials discussed in this course might be difficult for students from a variety of backgrounds. (These topics include but are not limited to: explicit mentioning of slurs and derogatory terms, depiction and discussion of pornography, sexual harassment, and rape.) Detailed content warning will be given prior to relevant units/readings. If you have any concerns about any elements of the course, or if there is any way that we can together make things easier to bear, please contact me by email, by Zoom, or in person.

### Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course; all readings will be made available on Sakai.

## 1. Course Description

This is an *upper-level* undergraduate course in philosophy of language. We will begin by studying classical theories, including theories of names, descriptions, implicatures, and speech acts. We will then apply these theories to contemporary debates in philosophy of language, including pornography, slurs, hate speech, silencing and subordinating speech, and microaggressions. We will end by looking at how language can be used to shape and resist our thoughts and reality.

## 2. Target Audience and Course Goals

While this course is designed for students who have taken at least one prior philosophy class, it does not presume specific background in linguistic theories or symbolic logic. It is aimed at developing your philosophical skills, including critical thinking, reading, and writing. It will train you to understand classic and contemporary works in philosophy and argue for your own positive views on the issues discussed beyond textual analysis.

At the end of the semester, you will write a term paper of 6-8 double-spaced pages. While you cannot write a longer paper for this assignment (to ensure anonymity and fairness in grading), I'd be more than happy to meet with you *after* the semester to develop your work into a longer piece that you can submit to an undergraduate philosophy journal or a conference.

## 3. Commitment to Respect and Diversity

Together as a class, we are committed to creating a safe learning environment for everyone involved, irrespective of their ability, age, economic status, ethnicity, first language, gender expression and

identity, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexuality. Personal offenses or discriminatory remarks toward others on any of these bases will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

During the semester, we will have *anonymous climate surveys* to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and respected during class discussions and lectures. If you have any concerns about the learning environment at any time during the semester, please do not hesitate to let me know.

#### 4. Course Assignments and Assessment

The requirements for this course are as follows.

Due Date	Assignment	Percentage
Daily	Attendance & Participation	10%
Daily	Reading Reactions	20%
TBA	Two Critical Responses (2-3 pages each)	20% (10% each)
2/22 (Wed)	Midterm Paper Outline (2 pages)	5%
3/10 (Thu)	Midterm Paper (5-6 pages)	15%
4/14 (Fri)	Term Paper Outline (2 pages)	5%
5/8 (Mon)	Term Paper (6-8 pages)	25%

##### Attendance & Participation (10%)

You will meet this requirement in part by attending class regularly. But you will also need to regularly participate in discussions and in-class activities to get full points. There will be *alternative* ways of earning participation points; we will discuss a specific guideline for these assignments in class.

In the mid-semester, I will release an *estimate* of your participation grade—this does not count toward your overall grade and only serves to give you a sense of how you have been doing so far. If what you see is not the grade you expected or wanted, come talk to me and we will discuss the ways to boost your grade!

##### Reading Reactions (20%)

Prior to each class meeting where there's a new assigned reading, you'll write a brief reaction (1-2 paragraphs) to the reading. On some days, I'll give you a question about the reading for you to answer in your reaction. On other days, I'll ask you to submit your own reaction that (1) briefly summarizes one of the main ideas, claims, or arguments in the reading, and (2) presents a question or a comment about this idea, claim, or argument.

**How to submit:** Include your reaction in the body of a message, not as an attachment, and send it via Sakai message, with the subject line RR Last Name Date (e.g. RR Jang 1/10) by 11:59pm the night before the class meeting.

There will be 24 reading reactions in total, which I'll grade *pass/fail*. I'll drop your lowest 4, and the remaining 20 will count toward your grade. You'll pass the reading reaction, if it clearly shows that you've carefully done the reading and made a serious attempt to engage with it. You'll fail the reading reaction, if it doesn't clearly show this attempt.

You can make up for *maximum two* missed reading reactions by writing a reflection paper on a film, a novel, or an article. The list of these materials will be updated during the semester.

### Two Critical Responses (*total 20%*)

During the semester, you will take turn to write two Critical Response papers (2-3 double-spaced pages) on the assigned readings. Your CR paper should explain an aspect of the reading that you found interesting (e.g., a particular argument, example, or question) and critically respond to it. A schedule and a specific guideline for this assignment will be posted on Sakai on the second week.

### Midterm Paper (*total 25%*)

You will choose from a list of prompts to write a longer paper. There are two steps to complete this assignment:

- (1) You will submit an outline for your paper (2 double-spaced pages). This outline will be worth 5% of your overall grade.
- (2) You will submit a paper (5-6 double-spaced pages) based on the feedback that you received on your outline. The paper will be worth 20% of your overall grade.

### Term Paper (*total 30%*)

You will write a longer paper on a topic of your choice. There are three steps to complete this assignment:

- (1) You will first have an individual meeting with me to discuss your ideas for a potential topic for your paper. You should come to the meeting having carefully thought about what you want to write about. Feel free to choose a topic that we haven't covered in class yet. You will have to read the assigned readings on that topic prior to coming to the meeting.
- (2) You will submit an outline for your paper (2 double-spaced pages.) This outline will again be worth 5% of your overall grade. (\*10 points will be deducted from your abstract grade if you did not have an initial meeting with me to discuss ideas.)
- (3) You will submit a paper (6-8 double-spaced pages) based on the feedback that you received on your outline. The paper will be worth 25% of your overall grade.

## 5. Grading and Other Class Policies

Each assignment will be marked out of the number of percentage points that it contributes to your overall grade. This will give you a total score of 100, which I'll convert to your final letter grade:

<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
94	90	87	84	80	77	74	70	67	60	0-59

For paper assignments, I'll also give you a corresponding letter grade. We'll look at grading criteria closer to the due dates.

### Anonymous Grading

I will grade the papers and the final exam *anonymously*. This means that you shouldn't put any identifying information on them, other than your PID number. Make sure to include your PID number *both* in the body of your paper *and* in the file name.

### Late Policy

Each paper is due at **11:59pm** sharp on the dates indicated below.

Late days. You are given "three late days" that you can freely use on any of the paper assignments (not applicable to reading reactions. You can use all three days on a single assignment, or spread them out on several assignments. (For instance, you may turn in your Midterm Paper three days late, or turn in your Midterm Paper an hour late and your Term Paper Outline two days late without getting a late penalty. Turning in an assignment an hour late will use up a whole late day.)

You don't have to tell me in advance, and I won't ask any questions! If you submit the paper late, I will simply deduct the day(s) from the remaining late days you have. *Once you have used up the late days, late papers will be docked a full letter grade (10%) for each calendar day (or part of a day) that they are late.* So, use the late days wisely!

Extension. You may earn an additional extension beyond the three late days given, if you make a reasonable request for an extension *at least 72 hours in advance* of the paper due date.

### Page Limit Policy

Your paper assignments are subject to strict page limits. To standardize length, all submissions should be: 12pt font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. If you have nonstandard formatting, I will convert it to standard formatting to check for length.

*I will dock a third of a letter grade for each third of a page you are over or under the required page range: 2-3 pages for the CR papers, 5-6 pages for the Midterm Paper, and 6-8 pages for the Term Paper (excluding the reference list or bibliography).*

### Plagiarism and the Honor Code

You are expected to abide by UNC's Honor Code, and refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. At UNC, plagiarism is defined as "deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." This includes *unintentionally* stealing another person's work or failing to give credit to someone else's idea *by accident*.

Just as you are bound by the Honor Code not to plagiarize, I am bound by it to report suspected cases of academic dishonesty of any kind to the Honor Court. If you are ever in any doubt as to whether something constitutes plagiarism, check with me first!

## 6. Resources

### Accommodations

If you need special accommodations for class assignments, please register with the Accessibility Resources & Service Office (<https://ars.unc.edu/>). Once I receive an official request from the ARS Office, I'd be happy to make the arrangements!

### Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS (<https://caps.unc.edu/>) is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, both for short-term and long-term needs.

### Writing Center

To ensure the anonymous grading, I will not read the paper drafts. But you can always set up an appointment with one of the coaches at the UNC Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>) to improve your paper at any stages of writing—from brainstorming to polishing a full draft.

### Title IX Resources

Any students impacted by acts of discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, stalking, and related retaliation are encouraged to report the incident and seek resources on campus or in the community.

Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Rebecca Gibson: [rmgibson@unc.edu](mailto:rmgibson@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential: [caps@unc.edu](mailto:caps@unc.edu)), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (confidential: [gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu)) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at <https://safe.unc.edu/>.

## 7. Reading Schedule (Subject to change)

1/10 Tue – Course Overview

### Unit 1. Names

1/12 Thu – John Stuart Mill, “Of Names” (1881)

1/17 Tue – Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference” (1892)

1/19 Thu – Frege (1892), cont’d

1/24 Tue - Hilary Putnam, “Meaning and Reference” (1973)

1/26 Thu – *CR Paper Writing Workshop*

### Unit 2. Descriptions

1/31 Tue – Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting” (1905)

2/2 Thu – Bertrand Russel, “Description” (1919)

2/7 Tue – P.F. Strawson, “On Referring” (1950)

2/9 Thu – Keith Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions” (1966)

2/14 Tue – *Unit 1 and 2 Review!*

### Unit 3. Implicatures

2/16 Thu – Grice, “Meaning” (1957)

2/21 Tue – Grice, “Logic and Conversation” (1975)

**2/22 Wed – Midterm Paper Outline due!**

2/23 Thu – Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Loose Talk” (1986)

### Unit 4. Speech Acts

2/28 Tue – J.L. Austin, Lecture 1 and 2 in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962)

3/2 Thu – J.L. Austin, Lecture 8 and 9 in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962)

3/7 Tue – John Searle, “What is a Speech Act?” (1965)

3/9 Thu – *Unit 3 and 4 Review!*

3/10 Fri – **Midterm Paper due!**

3/14 Tue and 3/16 Thu – *Spring break* (no class)

### Unit 5. Silencing and Subordinating Speech

3/21 Tue – Rae Langton, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts” (1993)

3/23 Thu – Rae Langton (1993), cont’d; Catharine MacKinnon, “Francis Biddle's Sister: Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech” in *Feminism Unmodified* (1987)

3/28 Tue – Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton, “Free Speech and Illocution” (1998)

3/30 Thu – Ishani Maitra, “Subordinating Speech” (2012)

### Unit 6. Slurs, Hate Speech, and Microaggressions

4/4 Tue – Luvell Anderson and Ernie Lepore, “What Did You Call Me? Slurs as Prohibited Words” (2013)

4/6 Thu – Lauren Ashwell, “Gendered Slurs” (2016)

4/11 Tue – Mary Kate McGowan, “On ‘Whites Only’ Signs and Racist Hate Speech: Verbal Acts of Racial Discrimination” (2012)

4/13 Thu – Javiera Perez Gomez, “Verbal Microaggressions as Hyper-implicatures” (2020)

4/14 Fri – **Term Paper Outline due!**

### Unit 7. Shaping and Resisting Reality

4/18 Tue – bell hooks, excerpts from *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (2014)

4/20 Thu – Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” (2000)

4/25 Tue – Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’” (2013)

4/27 Thu – Robin Dembroff & Daniel Wodak, “He/She/They/Ze” (2018)

5/8 Mon – **Term Paper Final Draft due!**