

**Grand Valley State University**  
**Syllabus**  
**PSY 357-01 and 02: Psychology of Language, Fall Semester, 2025**

**Instructor Information**

Name: Benjamin Swets, Ph.D., Professor  
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**Class Time and Place**

Section 01:	MW	11:00 am - 11:50 am	1310 ASH
Section 02:	MW	12:00 pm - 12:50 pm	174 LOH

Note: This is a hybrid course for which parts of the course will be administered online, asynchronously, through Blackboard. Students are expected to attend class in person on Mondays and Wednesdays, and complete additional coursework online. “Asynchronous” means that the online coursework can be done at any time before the due date.

**Prerequisites**

PSY 101 – Introductory Psychology

**Course Description (from GVSU)**

“Psychology of Language is a discipline that focuses on psychology's insights into human language. Topics include biological bases of language; human language and other communication systems; lexical, sentence, and discourse processing; speech production and perception; acquisition of spoken and written language; bilingualism; and the relationship between language and thought. Three credits. Offered fall and winter semesters.”

**Course Description (mine)**

It's easy to take language for granted. After all, it comes so easily to us that we barely have to think about it as we transform thoughts into words and sentences anyone can understand. But why does it come so easily? What kinds of cognitive events, of which we are almost never aware, must take place for us to understand and produce words and sentences? Can animals use language like we can? Is the ability to use language innate, or determined by the environment? Do we use language because we think, or do we think because we use language? This course will explore ways psychologists have tried to answer those questions, and others.

I also feel compelled to print this passage from your textbook (Harley, p. 19):

*Modern psychology is a science. That often comes as a surprise to students, many of whom think it's all going to be about Freud, or helping people, or helping them to understand themselves. Then they arrive at university and it's suddenly all statistics and computers and carrying out experiments. Psychology is harder than people think, and psycholinguistics is hardest of all: across the psychology degree curriculum it's usually the subject that most students find difficult to understand. It's difficult because the answers are complex; there's a great deal of terminology, and few definitive answers. Psycholinguistics is not for the faint-hearted; it's not for wimps. But because language is at the heart of what it means to be human, and is so central to so much of what we do, the study of psycholinguistics can be exceptionally rewarding.*

**Why Should You Take This Course?**

If you are interested in knowing how the human mind processes language, and have an appreciation for the scientific manner in which psychological science is conducted, this course will combine those two elements in a way that no other course at Grand Valley can. Language is also not a very well understood phenomenon by most people. We can use it automatically, but we rarely think about its basic mental mechanics. So, this course is an opportunity to gain

more of a conscious understand of the way you use language. Also, if you are a Psychology major or minor, this course satisfies a departmental requirement.

### **Course Objectives**

After successful completion of the course the students will be able to

- Describe theories and research on the linguistic representation of language.
- Describe theories and research concerning the cognitive processes that foster language acquisition and enable skilled language production and comprehension. as well as biological and cultural perspectives on language.
- Evaluate and explain the scientific study of human language, including critically evaluating psycholinguistic theories and experimental results. I consider this course to be an opportunity to teach more than just WHAT we know about psycholinguistics. It is an opportunity to also teach HOW psycholinguistics is studied. Psychology is a science, and this course will emphasize that point. When you leave this course, you should be able to evaluate a psycholinguistic theory presented in a journal article based on the given set of experimental results.
- Explain the biological, social, and cultural influences on language processes.

### **Required Text**

Textbook: T. A. Harley (2017). *Talking the Talk: Language, Psychology and Science (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. New York, NY: Psychology Press. Note: Although this textbook is required, it is acceptable for students to find the free, older edition of the textbook online, and use that instead.

### **Additional Readings**

At various times during the semester, additional readings will be assigned. These readings will be required, and will supplement the text and lecture. The instructor will announce and make the readings available on Blackboard, i.e., students will not be required to purchase them.

### **Required Equipment (owned or accessible)**

- High-speed internet access
- Computer with a sound card and speakers and operating system that meets current Blackboard browser requirements (Windows 10 or above, OS 10.14 or above)
- Microphone (built in or external)
- Computer camera (most laptops have a camera)

### **Course Webpage**

The instructor will administer all elements of the course using GVSU's Blackboard system. The webpage will contain pertinent course information, grades, lecture materials, announcements, readings, assignments, and exams. Students are responsible for all information provided via Blackboard. The full, detailed description of all assignments, exams, and due dates will be found in Blackboard.

To access Blackboard, go to <https://lms.gvsu.edu/ultra/course> and enter your log in and password.

Take a look at the GVSU Online Learning pages to find numerous materials about using Blackboard and online learning <http://www.gvsu.edu/online/>.

Use of Blackboard is integral to this course and students must log on a few times each week in order to complete course requirements, receive important announcements and updates, and communicate with instructors and other students about course content.

Check the current [technical requirements](#) to use Blackboard and [preferred browser information](#).

#### **Technical difficulties with Blackboard**

If you experience technical problems with Blackboard, contact the help desk by email or phone - [helpdesk@gvsu.edu](mailto:helpdesk@gvsu.edu) or 616-331-3513. The help website is <http://www.gvsu.edu/it/learn/>

## **Course Requirements**

*Quizzes/Assignments/Participation (~40 points total):* Throughout the semester, in-class assignments on course content will be given during lecture. The dates of these assignments will be determined randomly. *No make-up assignments will be administered*, but students may miss 1 in-class assignment without penalty. It is a good idea to do the reading and lecture video assignments before the date on which they are listed—it is not possible to adequately complete these assignments without having done the reading/viewing first. Some of the assignments may be take-home assignments. You are also expected to contribute to class discussion. 10 of the points from this section will come from participation. Your contribution(s) may be a question, an answer to a question, or a comment.

*Online Quizzes and Assignments (~40 points total):* Students will be assessed via a combination of low-stakes quizzes, written assignments, and discussion board activities throughout the semester. *No make-up or late assignments from this category will be administered*, but students may miss 2 online quizzes/assignments without penalty (i.e., the two lowest scores from this category will be dropped).

*Exams (160 points total):* There will be 4 exams worth 40 points apiece. Exam dates appear on the Course Schedule, below. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions that engage your understanding of course concepts. Questions may cover any information provided by the lecture, textbook, other readings, and supplementary classroom activities such as videos. Exams will not be cumulative.

## **Grading**

The Quizzes, Midterm Exams, and Final Exam will collectively be worth ~240 points. Based on your cumulative point score the following grades will be assigned:

<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Grade</i>		
93 – 100%	A	73 – 76.99%	C
90 – 92.99%	A-	70 – 72.99%	C-
87 – 89.99%	B+	67 – 69.99%	D+
83 – 86.99%	B	60 – 66.99%	D
80 – 82.99%	B-	59.99% or less	F
77 – 79.99%	C+		

THE GRADING SCALE AS PRINTED ABOVE IS *FINAL!* Any changes in grading policy will be announced in class and on the course website.

## **Attendance**

There is no attendance requirement, but I strongly recommend attending class, for several reasons: 1) Quizzes, in-class assignments and participation comprise a large part of the grading of this course. 2) There will be material covered in class that will not be found in the text book, but will be found in exam questions. 3) Repeated and varied exposure to course material results in better memory and understanding of that material.

## **Emergencies and Schedule Conflicts**

Absences from exams related to participation in a university-sanctioned event, a personal illness, a family emergency, or a major religious holiday will be excused provided that you a) give the instructor at least one week advance notice (when the conflict is foreseeable) or a timely explanation upon your return (when the conflict is unforeseeable) and b) give the instructor written documentation from an appropriate faculty member, university administrator, physician, or clergy member. Make-up exams will be administered only if an absence from the exam is excused for one of the above reasons. Note that vacation is not considered a valid excuse. You may take a make-up exam either at another time on the normal exam day, or on the soonest possible date thereafter. An unexcused absence from an exam will constitute a score of 0.

## Tentative Course Schedule

MODULE	DATE	TOPIC(S)	READING
1	Aug 25	Syllabus, Introduction	
	Aug 27	History and Practice of Psycholinguistics	Harley: Ch. 1, Carroll: Ch. 1
	Sep 1	<b>NO CLASS – LABOR DAY RECESS</b>	
	Sep 3	Linguistic Principles I: Phonology, Morphology	Carroll: Ch. 2
	Sep 8	Linguistic Principles II: Syntax, Recursion	
	Sep 10	Linguistic Principles III: Modern Ideas	
	Sep 15	Human vs. Animal Communication	Harley: Ch. 2
	Sep 17	<b>EXAM I</b>	
2			
	Sep 22	Language and Thought I	Harley: Ch. 4, Pullum (1989)
	Sep 24	Language and Thought II	
	Sep 29	Speech Perception I	Harley: pp. 129 - 138
	Oct 1	Speech Perception II	
	Oct 6	Reading I	Harley, pp. 138-151
	Oct 8	Sentence Comprehension: Modularity I	Harley: 164-178
3	Oct 13	Review	
	Oct 15	<b>EXAM II</b>	
	<b>Oct 20</b>	<b>NO CLASS: Fall Break</b>	
	Oct 22	Sentence Comprehension: Modularity and More	Tanenhaus et al.(1995)
	Oct 27	Sentence Production: Errors and Models	Harley:193-200; Ferreira et al. (2002)
	Oct 29	Sentence Production II: Planning and Dialogue	Harley: pp. 209-215
	Nov 3	Conversational Interaction I	Branigan et al. (2000)
4	Nov 5	Conversational Interaction II, Review	Harley: pp. 184-186, 215-216
	Nov 10	<b>EXAM III</b>	
	Nov 12	Early Language Acquisition	Harley: pp. 42-54
	Nov 17	Later Language Acquisition	Harley: pp. 54-57
	Nov 19	Acquisition: School Years	Harley: pp. 73-78, 151-160
	Nov 24	The Critical Period Hypothesis	Harley: pp. 67-73; Snow, 1978
	Nov 26	<b>NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Recess</b>	
	Dec 1	Theories of Biological Innateness	Harley: pp. 58-67
	Dec 3	Brain and Language	

*The above schedule is tentative. Any changes in the schedule will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.*

**Exam IV: Section 1 (11am section):** Wednesday, December 10, 10:00 am - 11:50 am

**Section 3 (12pm section):** Wednesday, December 10, 12:00 pm - 1:50 pm

Note: You must take the final exam with the section in which you are registered.

## **Caveat**

All of the information included in this syllabus, including the course schedule, assignments, and grading procedure, is subject to change. Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and on the course webpage.

*This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>*

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If there is any student in this class who has special needs because of learning, physical or other disability, please contact Disability Support Resources (DSR) at (616) 331-2490. I would be happy to help, but DSR is the proper channel. If you have a disability and think you will need assistance evacuating this classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make me aware so I can develop a plan to assist you.

## **AI Policy Statement** (adapted from David A. Joyner)

We treat AI-based assistance, such as ChatGPT and Copilot, the same way we treat collaboration with other people: you are welcome to talk about your ideas and work with other people, both inside and outside the class, as well as with AI-based assistants.

However, all work you submit must be your own. You should never include in your assignment anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (including quotation marks and in-line citation for direct quotes).

Including anything you did not write in your assignment without proper citation will be treated as an academic misconduct case. If you are unsure where the line is between collaborating with AI and copying from AI, we recommend the following:

1. Never hit "Copy" within your conversation with an AI assistant. You can copy your own work into your conversation, but do not copy anything from the conversation back into your assignment. Instead, use your interaction with the AI assistant as a learning experience, then let your assignment reflect your improved understanding.
2. Do not have your assignment and the AI agent open at the same time. Similar to above, use your conversation with the AI as a learning experience, then close the interaction down, open your assignment, and let your assignment reflect your revised knowledge. This includes avoiding using AI directly integrated into your composition environment: just as you should not let a classmate write content directly into your submission, so also avoid using tools that directly add content to your submission.

One more thing that I will add to this: When I assign papers to read and summarize, AI bots will often use certain words and phrases that do not sound like common undergraduate writing. More problematically, it will often bring in ideas and sources that I never introduced in the course materials. Even more problematically, AI answers are often very wrong. For all of these reasons, I, personally, would recommend **minimizing** AI resources for this course.

## **Academic Integrity**

**Section STU 4.0 of GVSU's Student Code contains very specific information about maintaining academic integrity. It states:** "The principles of academic honesty and integrity are fundamental to a community of scholars. The University expects that students will not engage in acts of academic dishonesty in curricular and non-curricular academic activities. Engaging in academic dishonesty compromises the integrity of university grades, and scholarship and research.

Academic dishonesty is defined as actions or behaviors that misrepresent one's contributions to or the results of any scholarly product submitted for credit, evaluation, or dissemination. This definition includes, but is not limited to, fabrication, falsification, cheating, and plagiarism. Terms are defined as the following:

- Cheating is defined as attempting to use materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise that have not been allowed by the instructor.
- Plagiarism is defined as offering the work of someone else as one's own. The language or ideas taken from another may range from isolated formulas, sentences, or paragraphs to entire articles copied from books, periodicals, speeches or the writings of other students. Academic dishonesty compromises the

integrity of grades, meaning that all academic work should be done by the student to whom it is assigned without unauthorized aid.

**Students will comply with the following rules, when engaging in coursework:**

1. No student shall knowingly, without authorization, procure, provide or accept any materials which contain questions or answers to any examination or assignment.
2. No student shall, without authorization, complete, in part or in total, any examination or assignment for another person.
3. No student shall, without authorization, allow any examination or assignment to be completed, in part or in total, by another person.
4. No student shall knowingly plagiarize or copy the work of another person and submit it as his/her own.
5. No student shall submit work that has been previously graded, or is being submitted concurrently to more than one course, without authorization from the instructor(s) of the class(es) to which the student wishes to submit it.

**PROCEDURES**

When the instructor feels that action beyond a failing course grade is warranted, the instructor will report the incident at [www.gvsu.edu/conduct](http://www.gvsu.edu/conduct) and request additional action via the University Conduct Process. When the alleged violation is related to the Academic Honesty - Integrity of Scholarships and Grades, the Hearing Body shall be composed of faculty members.

It is the instructor's responsibility to establish a classroom atmosphere that fosters academic honesty on the part of the students. If any instance of academic dishonesty is discovered by an instructor, they will notify the student and discuss the incident. After discussing the instance with the student, the instructor will make a decision. Depending on the instructor's judgment of the particular case, they may do nothing, impose additional course requirements, ask the student to repeat the work in question, or give a failing grade for the assignment, examination or the entire course. Any time an instructor addresses a violation of Academic Honesty with a failing grade on an assignment or in a course, they must report the incident at [www.gvsu.edu/conduct](http://www.gvsu.edu/conduct). Other incidents may be reported for tracking purposes. Reporting the incident will notify the Department Chair, the Dean of Students, and the Dean(s) of the Instructional Colleges. Reporting the incident does not automatically initiate additional action, but keeps record of the incident. Students may utilize the Academic Grievance Process to appeal a faculty initiated decision."