

Grand Valley State University
Syllabus
PSY 357-01: Psychology of Language, Summer Semester, 2025

Instructor Information

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Class Time and Place

Asynchronous Online Course administered via Blackboard

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.

Although I wouldn't put it as strongly, I also find this passage from your textbook (Harley, p. 19) to be important:

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 (2nd Edition)*. New York, NY: Psychology Press. Note: There are ways to access this textbook for free via Course Reserve or by reading the first edition of the textbook.

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 or 616-331-3513. The help website is <http://www.gvsu.edu/it/learn/>

Course Requirements

Quizzes/Assignments/Discussion Board Activities (~100-150 points): Students will be assessed via a combination of frequent low-stakes quizzes, written assignments, and discussion board activities on a weekly basis throughout the semester. There will be limited time windows (typically 1-2 weeks long) during which these items can be completed, so it will be important to check Blackboard frequently to complete these assignments on time throughout the semester. *No make-up or late assignments from this category will be administered*, but students may miss 3 such assignments without penalty.

Exams (150 points total): There will be three exams worth 50 points apiece. Exam dates appear on the Course Schedule, below. Exams may consist of essay questions, short answer questions, and multiple choice questions that gauge your understanding of course concepts. Questions may cover any information provided by the lecture videos, textbook, other readings, and supplementary materials such as videos. Posted review sheets will allow students to know more precisely what they will be expected to know. Exams will not be cumulative. All exams will be administered via a software program called Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor. The software allows for fair, secure tests by preventing students from accessing other programs and ensuring that student knowledge is being validly measured. It's best to think of this software as a way to simulate the experience of students taking a proctored exam in a regular classroom, but from the location of the student's choice.

Grading

The Quizzes, Midterm Exams, and Final Exam will collectively be worth approximately 275 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 on the course website.

Using LockDown Browser and a Webcam for Online Exams

The purpose of exams is to gauge whether students have successfully learned course content and skills. To support that success, exams must be administered fairly. I find that students want exactly that—they want to know that when they have studied hard for an exam, they are being fairly recognized for that work and knowledge. The suspicion that others might be “gaming the system” can be dispiriting. This is especially relevant for online courses, where there is no in-class proctor or instructor present to ensure fair testing circumstances for all concerned. To help alleviate these problems, this course requires the use of LockDown Browser and a webcam for online exams. The software simulates conditions of taking an in-person exam—it prevents students from looking at notes and course materials, and from communicating questions and answers with each other.

Although further information about this software will be provided after the course has begun, it is important to be aware up front that this is how exams will be administered, and that there are certain hardware requirements to take exams this way. The required webcam can be built into your computer or can be the type that plugs in with a USB cable. Watch this [short video](#) to get a basic understanding of LockDown Browser and the webcam feature.

When taking an online exam that requires LockDown Browser and a webcam, remember the following guidelines:

- Ensure you're in a location where you won't be interrupted
- Turn off all other devices (e.g. tablets, phones, second computers) and place them outside of your reach. During the Environment Check video that you will take, record yourself placing your phone out of view.
- Clear your desk of all external materials not permitted — books, papers, other devices, and prove in the Environment Check video that it is convincingly clear. Failure to do so will result in a 0 on the exam.
- Before starting the test, know how much time is available for it, and that you've allotted sufficient time to complete it
- Remain at your computer for the duration of the test
- If the computer or networking environment is different than what was used previously with the **Webcam Check** and **System & Network Check** in LockDown Browser, run the checks again prior to starting the test
- To produce a good webcam video, do the following:
 - Avoid wearing baseball caps or hats with brims
 - Ensure your computer or tablet is on a firm surface (a desk or table). Do NOT have the computer on your lap, a bed or other surface where the device (or you) are likely to move
 - If using a built-in webcam, avoid tilting the screen after the webcam setup is complete
 - Take the exam in a well-lit room and avoid backlighting, such as sitting with your back to a window
- Remember that LockDown Browser will prevent you from accessing other websites or applications; you will be unable to exit the test until all questions are completed and submitted

Netiquette

This course will involve frequent opportunities to interact with your peers via the Blackboard Discussion Board. Although many of us have experience with e-mail, online discussion is different because we're communicating "one to many" rather than "one to one." Therefore, it's important that we maintain a sense of freedom to express our thoughts while at the same time providing a safe atmosphere for that expression. Please keep this mind as you are communicating with others.

All participants should maintain a professional attitude and manner of discussion. While spirited debate is encouraged, unprofessional behavior is not tolerated. Words often come across "more directly and harshly" in this written form of communication, since there are no facial gestures, expression or tone of voice to help convey your message fully. Your contributions should not be overly negative or personal in nature.

Emergencies and Schedule Conflicts

Exams will be administered online during limited time windows on specific days throughout the semester (see tentative schedule below). Absences from these 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.

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 to develop a plan of assistance that you can provide to me.

Tentative Course Schedule

Learning Modules: The learning modules in Blackboard will be a foundational part of the course. Modules are where you will find instructions for each segment of the course including reading assignments, video lectures, practice activities, and assignments. Modules will open up one to two weeks at a time and various assignments will be due during those windows. All previous modules will be open throughout the course.

MODULE	DATE	TOPIC(S)	READING
1	June 23- June 30	History and Practice of Psycholinguistics	
		Linguistic Principles: Phonology, Morphology	Harley: Ch. 1, Carroll: Ch. 1
		Linguistic Principles II: Syntax, Recursion	Carroll: Ch. 2
		Linguistic Principles III: Modern Ideas	
2	July 1- July 8	Human vs. Animal Communication	Harley: Ch. 2
		Language and Thought	Harley: Ch. 4, Pullum (1989)
		Speech Perception	Harley: pp. 129-138
		Review for Exam 1	
	July 9	EXAM I: Modules 1 and 2	
3	July 10- July 17	Reading	Harley, pp. 138-151
		Sentence Comprehension: Modularity I	Harley: 164-178
		Sentence Comprehension: Modularity II	Tanenhaus et al. (1995)
		Sentence Comprehension: Beyond Mod.	Ferreira et al. (2002)
4	July 18- July 23	Sentence Production: Errors and Models	Harley: pp. 193-200
		Sentence Production II: Planning	Harley: pp. 209-215
		Sentence Production: Priming in dialogue	Branigan (2000)
		Conversational Interaction	Harley: pp. 184-186, 215-216
	July 24	EXAM II: Modules 3 and 4	
5	July 25- July 31	Language Acquisition: Sounds and Words	Harley: pp. 42-54
		Language Acquisition: Grammar	Harley: pp. 54-57
		Applied Acquisition: Reading	Harley: pp. 73-78,
		Applied Acquisition: Bilingualism	Harley: pp. 151-160
6	Aug 1 – Aug 5	The Critical Period Hypothesis I	Harley: pp. 77-83
		The Critical Period Hypothesis II	Snow and H-H
		Innateness	Harley: pp. 58-67
		Brain and Language	Harley: pp. 216-220
	Aug 6	Exam III: Modules 5 and 6	

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

Caveat

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

Tips for a Successful Learning Experience

**Although these might seem obvious and simple, they will make a difference*

- ☐ Read the syllabus and view all preparatory information on Blackboard
- ☐ Stay organized and track due dates
- ☐ Plan weekly study times
- ☐ KEEP UP ON THE READING AND LECTURES
- ☐ Take your own notes on each lecture video, or write your own notes into the provided slides
- ☐ Log onto Blackboard at least 3 times per week to check announcements, discussion board, and interact with course material. Online courses require perseverance, self-discipline, self-motivation, and the ability to work independently – more so than face-to-face on-campus classes.
- ☐ Get to know the other students in the class and help each other learn the language and the concepts
- ☐ Post questions, comments, and ideas on discussion board
- ☐ Ask questions of the instructor. Not just clarification questions about logistics, but content questions.

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, the AI answers are often very wrong. *For all of these reasons, I, personally, would recommend **not** using 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 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. 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."