

***How Reading Works: Language, Cognition, and Literacy***  
**Course information & policies (Syllabus)**

<i>Instructor</i>	<b>Jennifer Smith</b> (jlsmith@email.unc.edu), 309 Smith Bldg, <i>she/her</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are welcome to call me Jen, Dr. Smith, or Prof. Smith.</li> </ul>
<i>Course meets</i>	<b>TuTh 12:30-1:45, Dey 304</b> [F-8 on map] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-person instruction: Lecture, discussion in large and small groups, hands-on activities and problem-solving, and student presentations.</li> </ul>
<i>Readings and course materials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course readings are available electronically through UNC Libraries.</li> <li>Some assignments use blogs, podcasts, or videos (with transcripts).</li> <li>No textbook is required.</li> </ul>
<i>Website</i>	<a href="https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling060.html">https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling060.html</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website includes announcements, relevant links, readings, assignments, and a detailed course syllabus (updated after every class).</li> </ul>
<i>Office hours</i>	W 12:15–1:15 (309 Smith Bldg) and by appointment; Zoom by request <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Come if you have questions, need help, or want more information—or just to say hi!</li> </ul>

## I. Overview

In many societies today, we live our lives surrounded by the written word. But did you ever stop to wonder **how reading works**? How do we go from looking at symbols on a page, sign, or screen to understanding the writer's message? How do children learn to read, and what ways of teaching reading would best promote success for all students? We will explore these questions through analysis of language and writing-system structure, as well as discussion of the primary research literature. Your final course project will address a real-world question about reading, literacy, or reading education from the perspective of language and cognition.

Course goals and key learning objectives

- Develop an understanding of how speech sounds (consonants, vowels, syllables), words and their parts, and larger units like sentences are structured in the human cognitive system of language, and how they are part of the reading process
- Develop skills as an informed consumer of research results: Identify key questions and results in research papers; check reported results for statistical significance and identify potential biases and confounds; explain and evaluate data graphics
- Become familiar with topics and methods in linguistics and cognitive science
- Critically examine approaches to teaching reading, and evaluate their validity
- Formulate your own research question that connects reading to cognition, education, or literacy; locate published research data from two different sources whose combination or synthesis addresses your question; and present your findings

Who should take this course?

- This course is for you if you are interested in reading, reading education, or human language, and want to learn to think critically about these topics.

- This course is a First-Year Seminar that fulfills the Reflection and Integration: Research and Discovery (RESEARCH) requirement. (See learning outcomes below.)
- This course emphasizes learning to read and understand quantitative (numerical) research results—a skill that is useful for understanding any social, physical, or natural science, and more generally helps us interpret and evaluate news stories and media reports in daily life.

## II. Course requirements

**Final grades** are calculated as follows:

A. Preparation & participation	15%
B. Reflection essays (5)	25%
C. Article interpretation & presentation	20%
D. Final project development assignments	25%
E. Final project presentation	15%

### Grading scale (points for letter grade)

A+*	97–100 (98)	C+	77–79 (78)
A	93–96 (95)	C	73–76 (75)
A–	90–92 (91)	C–	70–72 (71)
B+	87–89 (88)	D+	67–69 (68)
B	83–86 (85)	D	60–66 (65)
B–	80–82 (81)	F	0–59

\*No A+ final course grades at UNC-CH

### A. Preparation and participation

You will get the most out of this course if you are **actively engaged**. In particular:

- Complete readings and assignments on time
- Attend class and participate in class discussion and activities

**Readings and online materials:** Readings and/or other materials are assigned before almost every class. In-class activities will not simply repeat this information—we will use it and build on it, so be sure you are prepared. **Expect to be called on!**

If accessing websites or audio/video files will be difficult for any reason, please contact me soon so that we can devise alternative assignments when necessary.

**Preparation/participation grading:** There will be frequent **preparation activities** (submitted in Canvas **before** class) and **participation activities** (completed **in class**, often as part of a group discussion or problem-solving activity). These will all be graded pass/fail. Missed questions or activities may not be made up without prior approval. Preparation/participation grades are determined by the percentage of preparation/participation activities passed after the lowest 10% of scores are dropped.

### B. Reflection essays

Reflection essays are 1–2 page writing assignments, due 5 times during the first 10 weeks of the semester. Each essay will answer a specific question; typically, you will reflect on your personal experience or a blog post, podcast, or video, and relate it to course material. Reflection essays are graded as A/B/0, and any legitimate attempt at an answer will earn at least a B. Each essay will be accepted up to two weeks after its deadline for a one-grade penalty (A→B, B→C). At the end of the semester, the lowest reflection-essay grade will be dropped, so you can miss one with no consequences.

### C. Article interpretation and presentation

You will participate in a **group presentation** of the results (data and analysis) of one of the research articles assigned as a course reading during weeks 5–10. I will assign groups based on your co-working requests and topic preferences as far as possible. This assignment will be given a letter grade, A+ to F, and the grade includes individual components as well as the group's joint presentation. Detailed information will be provided separately, but keep in mind that A grades are for excellent work that shows thought, insight, clear communication, and more-than-superficial understanding. *A+ grades are very rare* and are earned for truly exceptional work.

### D/E. Final project

This course has a final project in place of a traditional final exam. Project-related assignments are in two phases, with development assignments beginning in about week 11. Each assignment in these categories will be given a letter grade, A+ to F, as above.

#### ***Project development assignments:***

- *Topic proposal:* Identify two research articles that address the same reading-related topic in two different ways (for example, they may support opposing positions in a debate, or investigate two distinct aspects of the same larger question). Sketch a preliminary plan for how you will compare and contrast, or synthesize, the two articles for your project.
- *Article summaries:* For each of your two articles, summarize the research questions, methodology/experiment design, results, and analysis/interpretation.

#### ***Project presentation:***

- *Presentation document:* Create a presentation document (slides) synthesizing the two research papers. If they take opposing positions, outline and explain each position and determine which is better supported and why (or why we can't decide). If they investigate two aspects of the same larger question, outline and explain each contribution and discuss what we learn from putting the two together.
- *Lightning talk:* During the final-exam period, you will give a lightning-talk version of your presentation (approximately 5–6 minutes long).

Detailed information will be provided later in the semester, but please note that attendance at the presentation session during our final exam period (**M May 6, 4–7pm**) is a **mandatory** part of the course. Changes to your final-exam time can only be made through the office of your dean.

### **III. Course policies**

Devices in class: Please use laptops or other devices only for class-related activities.

Studies show that students who use devices for non-class activities impair their own learning—and their neighbors' learning too (Fried 2006; Sana, Weston, & Cepeda 2013).

Class absences: If you need to miss class for health or other reasons, be sure to keep up with course material and assignment deadlines posted on the course web site.

Lecture outlines and other items will be posted there shortly before or after class.

Late assignments: Assignments have due dates because material in this course builds on earlier concepts. However, sometimes emergencies happen or life is complicated.

- As described above: **Reflection essays** are accepted up to two weeks late with a one-grade penalty; **preparation/participation activities** may not be made up.
- For **other assignments**:
  - (i) With **advance** permission (before the due date), extensions **may** be granted, possibly with a late penalty.
  - (ii) If an **illness or emergency** makes you unexpectedly unable to complete an assignment, please email me as soon as possible to request an **emergency extension**. This **may** be granted, possibly with a late penalty.

Collaboration/citation: You are encouraged to discuss assignments with other students, but every student (or group, for a group assignment) must write up his/her/their assignment independently. If any reference materials other than assigned readings or media, lecture outlines, handouts, course webpages, or in-class notes are consulted for an assignment, you must cite those outside references in your assignment.

Artificial intelligence (AI) use: The following uses of generative AI tools are permitted in this course: topic selection, brainstorming, idea generation, and searching for published research papers. Without advance permission, any other use of generative AI tools will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and will be referred to the Honor System. (If you have questions about AI use, please ask!)

Weather cancellations: Unless University classes are officially canceled, you should assume that our class will be held, but if there is bad weather, please use your own judgment about whether it is safe for you to travel to campus. If classes are canceled, check the course web site for announcements and schedule changes.

Diversity statement: I value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender identity, native language and language variety, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students; please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve.

• **The following policies are UNC-CH standard policies:**

Attendance policy: As stated in the University's [Class Attendance Policy](#), no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities: [University Approved Absence Office \(UAAO\) website](#) provides information and [FAQs for students](#) and [FAQs for faculty](#) related to University Approved Absences
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

Honor Code: All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC honor code. In particular, students are expected to refrain from "lying, cheating, or stealing" in the

academic context. If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please consult [honor.unc.edu](https://honor.unc.edu) or talk to your instructor.

Syllabus changes: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

• ***The following resources may be helpful to you:***

Accessibility Resources and Service: ARS (<https://ars.unc.edu>) receives requests for accommodations, and through the Student and Applicant Accommodations Policy determines eligibility and identifies reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or chronic medical conditions to mitigate or remove the barriers experienced in accessing University courses, programs and activities.

ARS also offers its Testing Center resources to students and instructors to facilitate the implementation of testing accommodations.

Counseling and Psychological Services: UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](https://heelscarenetwork.org) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to their website <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

Title IX and related resources: Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/> or by contacting the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)) or the Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)). Confidential resources include [Counseling and Psychological Services](https://counselingandpsychologicalservices.org) and the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu)). Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](https://safe.unc.edu).

Optimize your academic performance: For tips, advice, and strategies, consider talking to experts or attending events at the Learning Center (<http://learningcenter.unc.edu/>) and the Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/>).

#### **IV. Schedule of course topics and assignments**

- *Course materials:* One or two **readings** (topic overviews or research articles) are assigned each week; readings are available electronically through UNC Libraries and/or the course Sakai site. Reflection essays draw on a combination of personal experience, course readings, and resources such as **blog posts, podcasts, and videos**.
- *Schedule of course topics:* Please see the [Schedule of topics](#) page on the course web site.

## **V. Course reserves: Assigned and additional readings**

See the [Course Reserves](#) tool in Canvas for a selection of readings about linguistics, cognitive science, and the psycholinguistics of reading. Some of these reserve materials will be assigned readings for class, while others provide additional resources.

## **VI. Learning outcomes for First-Year Seminars**

*These are the learning outcomes that are expected of students after completing a course.*

- Connect with a faculty member early in the educational process.
- Learn intensively among a small cohort of students.
- Apply methods for how scholars pose problems, discover solutions, resolve controversies, and evaluate knowledge.
- Produce knowledge through self-directed inquiry and active learning.

## **VII. Reflection and Integration: Research and Discovery**

Learning Outcomes

*These are the learning outcomes that are expected of students after completing a course.*

- Frame a topic, develop an original research question or creative goal, and establish a point of view, creative approach, or hypothesis.
- Obtain a procedural understanding of how conclusions can be reached in a field and gather appropriate evidence.
- Evaluate the quality of the arguments and/or evidence in support of the emerging product.
- Communicate findings in clear and compelling ways.
- Critique and identify the limits of the conclusions of the project and generate ideas for future work.

Questions for Students

*These are the types of questions you should be able to answer after completing a course.*

- How do I establish my point of view, take intellectual risks, and begin producing original scholarship or creative works?
- How do I narrow my topic, critique current scholarship, and gather evidence in systematic and responsible ways?
- How do I evaluate my findings and communicate my conclusions?