LING 523 | Phonological Theory I — Spring 2026 | *UNC Chapel Hill*
Course information & policies (Syllabus)

Instructor	**Jennifer Smith** (jlsmith@email.unc.edu), 309 Smith Bldg, *she/her* • You are welcome to call me Jen, Dr. Smith, or Prof. Smith.
Course meets	**MW 3:35–4:50** [see Canvas Syllabus for location]	3.0 credit hours • Includes lecture, discussion, analysis/problem-solving, and presentations. • Pre-class preparation: readings, data sets, assignments.
Course materials (no textbook)	**Website:** https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling523.html • Readings, assignments, lecture outline slides, and a detailed course syllabus (updated after every class). See also the LING 523 **Canvas** site.
Office hours	Tu 2:00-3:30 (309 Smith Bldg) **and** by appointment; Zoom by request • Come if you have questions, need help, or want more information—or just say hi!

I. Overview

This course is a graduate introduction to the theory and practice of generative phonology. You will develop first-hand experience with phonological analysis and the construction and evaluation of linguistic models through hands-on problem solving and a final project. Assigned readings include both introductory materials and articles from the primary phonology research literature.

LING 523 emphasizes hypothesis-testing and argumentation, skills that are essential in all areas of linguistics. It will help you with your thesis, whether that is on phonology or not.

II. Prerequisites

The prerequisite for this course is LING 520 (Linguistic Phonetics) or the equivalent.

- Undergraduate students who do not have significant prior background in linguistics or phonological analysis usually enroll in **Linguistics 200**, which is the phonology course for undergraduate majors.
- If you have completed LING 200, you are not eligible to apply LING 523 toward the BA major. However, if you have applied LING 200 toward your BA, you *can* apply LING 523 toward your MA.

III. Course requirements

Final grades are calculated as follows:

			Grading scale *(points for letter grade)*			
A.	Active participation (includes SQs)	15%	A+*	97–100 *(98)*	C+	77–79 (*78*)
B.	Phonetics & distribution quiz	10%	A/**H**	93–96 (*95*)	C	73–76 (*75*)
C.	Analysis assignments (2)	20%	A–	90–92 (*91*)	C–/**L**	70–72 (*71*)
D.	Phonological concepts exam	20%	B+	87–89 (*88*)	D+	67–69 (*68*)
E.	Final "squib" project	35%	B	83–86 (*85*)	D	60–66 (*65*)
	• proposal: 10%		B–	80–82 (*81*)	F	0–59
	• peer feedback process: 10%					
	• squib/presentation: 15%					

*No A+ final course grades at UNC-CH

A. Active participation: Plan to attend class; complete the readings, discussion exercises, and preparation questions on time; and participate actively in class discussion. Your participation grade is based mostly on the **% of spot-check questions completed**, but **exceptional** participation in discussion or a consistent **lack** of participation in discussion may be factored in as well.

- *Readings* are assigned regularly, often with a "reading guide" handout to give you guidance about what to focus on. Be prepared to discuss readings in class, sometimes along with a discussion exercise you have prepared or with new data.

- *Discussion exercises* (DEs) are phonological analysis problems that form the basis of the upcoming class discussion. They are posted on the LING 523 web site as they are assigned. Plan to complete them before class and participate in discussing them.

- *Spot-check questions* (SQs) are often assigned along with a DE or a reading, usually on Canvas (but occasionally during class). These let me check everyone's understanding and finalize plans for class discussion. SQs are *due by 2:00pm* unless otherwise stated. They may sometimes ask you to go beyond material already discussed in class, but they are graded complete/incomplete—try to give the best answer you can. The two lowest SQs for the semester will be dropped, but late SQs will not be accepted for credit except in unusual circumstances.

> **Please note**: Completion of discussion exercises is one of the ***most important parts*** of this course, because phonology is best learned by actually doing it. DEs give you hands-on experience with concepts covered in readings and class discussion. Sometimes they require you to go beyond what has already been covered in order to consider the implications or shortcomings of a particular approach. DEs are ***essential preparation*** for the work in this course.
>
> You should expect to spend a ***significant amount of time*** on each DE, sometimes an hour or more depending on the data set. ***Prepare notes or an informal write-up*** of each DE so that you are ready to discuss your work in class.
>
> Answering spot-check questions should happen ***after*** you have worked out a ***complete analysis*** of the relevant DE. The SQs are only a quick sample of your work; actual class preparation is a thorough analysis of the full DE problem.

- *Pop quizzes:* There may be occasional pass/fail pop quizzes given in class, based on the major contents of readings or discussion exercises; these will be counted as SQs.

- *Attendance:* While attendance is not graded directly, multiple absences may make it difficult for you to keep up with the course material. *If you miss too many classes, I will ask you to meet with me and discuss options.*

  If you have to miss class, it is your responsibility to collect any missed materials or notes from the web or from other students in the class. Always check the course website for news and assignments if you have been absent.

B. Phonetics and distribution quiz: Reviews basic phonetics concepts and predictable/ contrastive distribution. Given in class (closed book) on ***Monday, January 26***.

C. Analysis assignments (2): Involve the analysis of a phonological data set similar to those in discussion exercises, except that you support your solution systematically with organized arguments and evidence, and your work earns a letter grade. Analysis assignments follow up on material from readings, discussion exercises, and class discussion, and may include aspects that require creative thinking beyond what has been covered in the course. AA #1 will be presented in class by small groups, and AA #2 will be submitted as a written paper (optionally in small groups).

- Analysis assignments must be clear, legible, and well-organized. ***Grades will depend on how clearly and carefully you present and argue for your analysis, not only on whether the analysis is "right."*** Expect to spend several hours on an analysis assignment. It is best to work out a complete solution to the problem on scratch paper before even beginning the presentation slides or write-up.

D. Phonological concepts exam: This exam is currently scheduled for ***Wednesday, April 8*** in class. It includes short-answer questions to check for basic understanding of essential concepts, as well as problems that test your ability to carry out and defend a phonological analysis. If you have a conflict with the exam date, please let me know ***in advance*** so that we can schedule a make-up exam. If you miss the exam with no advance warning, you may not be allowed to make it up.

E. Final squib project: A 'squib' is a short, original linguistics paper. During the last few weeks of the semester, you will select your own topic (in consultation with me), submit a proposal with references, discuss your analysis with a peer in a workshop format, and present a final version to the class. Detailed information about the squib project will be provided later.
- Squib **proposal** due in early April (exact date TBA)
- In-class **peer review workshop** of your data and analysis: ***M Apr 27***
- Final squib **presentation** during our final-exam period, ***Th Apr 30, 4–7 pm***

General expectations for coursework: Important goals for a graduate student include developing a mastery of the basic concepts of linguistics and also of organization and argumentation skills. If your work consistently receive grades lower than B, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss strategies for success. If phonology will be a significant part of your MA project, you should talk to me if you are not consistently receiving at least A– on graded work or are having trouble with accuracy on spot-check questions.

For all students: Please **seek help** if you are feeling confused about course material, whether on a specific assignment or in general. I can't give you assignment answers, but I might be able to help you see what to think about or how to structure your discussion.

IV. Course policies

A. 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). Some portions of class time are **device-free** (except for official accommodations).

B. Artificial intelligence (AI) use: Use of generative AI tools of any kind is not permitted in this course unless otherwise specified on an assignment. Any unauthorized use of these tools will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

C. Recording of class sessions: In general, no audio or video recording of class sessions is permitted. If you have questions or concerns, please talk with me.

D. Class absences: See information under II.A. Active participation above, and see below for the UNC Attendance Policy on University Excused Absences.

F. Extensions, make-up exams and late submissions: In general, **no late assignments will be accepted**, but exceptions may be considered as follows:
   (i)   With *advance* permission, extensions *may* be granted, possibly with a late penalty.
   (ii) If an illness or emergency unexpectedly makes you unable to submit an assignment, please provide a *written explanation* of the situation and request an extension. On a case-by-case basis, such assignments *may* be accepted, possibly with a late penalty.

G. Collaboration/citation policy for assignments: You are strongly encouraged to discuss problem sets with your classmates (please list the names of any collaborators when you turn in an assignment). However, you (or your group, for a group assignment) must *write up* your assignment *independently*.

   The use of outside references for an assignment is *strongly discouraged* unless otherwise stated. However, *if* you consult any materials that are not assigned in this course for any assignment, you must cite such outside references in your assignment (this includes course-reserves readings).

H. 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.

Other policies (UNC standard and required items):
- 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 about University Approved Absences.
   2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by the University Compliance Office , or in the case of short-term military service, the Dean of Students.
   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 University Compliance Office.
- Code of Conduct — I expect all students to follow the guidelines of the UNC Student Code of Conduct. In particular, students are expected to be aware of policies related to academic integrity. You can read more about the Code of Conduct at studentconduct.unc.edu. In any course, including mine, what constitutes cheating can change from one activity to another. For example, collaboration may be encouraged for an assignment but qualify as cheating during an exam. Please see my guidelines for each activity, and if you are unsure, please ask me to clarify.
- Non-discrimination policy — As set out in the University's Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination, the University is committed to providing an environment where all members of

our community can learn, work, and thrive. Consistent with these principles and applicable laws, it is therefore the University's policy not to discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or veteran status as consistent with the University's Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Related Misconduct. No person, on the basis of protected status, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to unlawful discrimination, harassment, or retaliation under any University program or activity, including with respect to employment terms and conditions. The University will consider only relevant factors such as individual abilities and qualifications in admissions, hiring, disciplinary action, and all other decisions and will apply consistent standards of conduct and performance.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (email reportandresponse@unc.edu or see additional contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the University Compliance Office. Please note that I am designated as a Responsible Employee, which means that I must report to the UCO any information I receive about harassment or discrimination. If you'd like to speak with a confidential resource, those include Counseling and Psychological Services and the University's Ombuds Office.

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) use — Carolina students are expected to follow these AI guidelines:
    1. AI should help you think, not think for you. You may be able to use these tools to brainstorm ideas, research topics, and analyze problems, but you must decide what's appropriate and accurate.
    2. Engage responsibly with AI. You must evaluate AI-generated outputs for potential biases, limitations, inaccuracies, false output, and ethical implications. Do not put personal or confidential data into these tools.
    3. The use of AI must be open and documented. You should declare, explain, and cite any use of AI in the creation of your work using applicable standards (e.g., APA, MLA, course guidelines). Understand that you are ultimately 100% responsible for your final product.
    4. Follow specific AI guidelines in this syllabus. If you are unsure, check with me. Guidance offered in this syllabus would be referenced should an issue be referred to Student Conduct for alleged academic misconduct.
- Acceptable Use policy — By attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) sets the expectation that you will use the University's technology resources responsibly, consistent with the University's mission. In the context of a class, it's quite likely you will participate in online activities that could include personal information about you or your peers, and the AUP addresses your obligations to protect the privacy of class participants. In addition, the AUP addresses matters of others' intellectual property, including copyright. These are only a couple of typical examples, so you should consult the full Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy, which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property.

    Additionally, consult the Safe Computing at UNC website for information about data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.
- 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.

Resources for student wellness and learning

- University Compliance Office — University Compliance Office (UCO) Accommodations Team (Accommodations - UNC Compliance) receives requests for accommodations for disability, pregnancy and related conditions, and sincerely held religious beliefs and practices through the University's Policy on Accommodations. UCO Accommodations team determines eligibility and reasonable accommodations consistent with state and federal laws.

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) — UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The Heels Care Network 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 the CAPS website 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 UCO or by contacting the University's Title IX Coordinator, Elizabeth Hall, or the Report and Response Managers in the University Compliance Office (UCO) (formerly the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office). Please note that I am designated as a Responsible Employee, which means I must report to the UCO any information I receive about the forms of misconduct listed in this paragraph. If you'd like to speak with a confidential resource, those include Counseling and Psychological Services, the University's Ombuds Office, and the Gender Violence Services Coordinators. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.
- Writing Center and Learning Center — The Writing Center and Learning Center have many valuable resources to support student learning.

IV. Schedule of course topics

The schedule of course topics is available on the course website, at:
https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling523/schedule.html

V. Additional readings

The following books are good sources for additional background on specific topics in phonology. They are on reserve under "LING523" in Davis Library; some are e-reserves. See Course Reserves in Canvas.

- de Lacy, Paul (ed.). 2007. *The Cambridge handbook of phonology.* Cambridge, UK: CUP.
- Goldsmith, John, et al. (eds.). 2011. *The handbook of phonological theory*, 2ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kager, René. 1999. *Optimality Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kenstowicz, Michael. 1994. *Phonology in generative grammar*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- McCarthy, John. 2002. *A thematic guide to Optimality Theory*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- McCarthy, John. 2008. *Doing Optimality Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- van Oostendorp, Marc, et al. (eds.). 2011. *The Blackwell Companion to Phonology.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 5 volumes.
- Zsiga, Elizabeth. 2013. *The sounds of language.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.