

LING 225 | Busting Language Myths
Course information and policies (Syllabus)
Fall 2025 • UNC Chapel Hill • 3.0 credits

<i>Instructor</i>	Dr. Jennifer Smith (j1smith@email.unc.edu), 309 Smith Bldg, <i>she/her</i> • You are welcome to call me Dr. Smith, Prof. Smith, or Jen.
<i>Course meets</i>	MWF 12:20–1:10, Hanes Art 218 [E-6 on map] • In-person instruction: Lecture, discussion, activities, student presentations.
<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Women Talk More Than Men...And Other Myths About Language Explained</i> (A. Kaplan, 2016) • At the campus bookstore. Additional readings may be distributed in class or online.
<i>Web site</i>	https://users.castle.unc.edu/~j1smith/ling225.html • Resources, assignments, and a detailed course syllabus (updated after every class).
<i>Office hours</i>	Tu 2:00–3:15 (309 Smith Bldg) and by appointment • Come if you have questions, need help, or want more information—or just to say hi!

I. Overview and goals

“Women talk more than men! Texting means the end of literacy! The language you speak limits the thoughts you can think!” We often hear claims like these, but are they true? And what kind of information would show us the answer? Join some fun and lively debates about language, while gaining skills in **reading and interpreting** media reports, research results, basic statistics, and data graphics. You will practice **communicating** effectively with different audiences and in different situations. You will also become familiar with fundamental topics and methods in experiment-based linguistics and cognitive science.

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to...

- Argue convincingly *for* or *against* commonly encountered beliefs about language
- Articulate a research question, at the big-picture and measurable levels, that lets you test the validity of a claim about language
- Explain the data that is shown in a graphic or table, and interpret whether/how patterns in the data answer a research question
- Apply the results of a published research paper to answer a research question, while critically assessing the quality of the results and their relevance to the question
- Create and deliver presentations addressing a “language myth” that are appropriate for different kinds of audience (novice/expert, resistant/ambivalent/supportive, etc.)

This course satisfies the **Focus Capacities** “Ethical and Civic Values” *or* “Ways of Knowing.” [In the future, it may satisfy COMMBEYOND.] There are **no prerequisites**, but it is also open to LING majors/minors who want to work with linguistics research results.

If you would like to know more about the linguistics major, minor, or BA/MA program, please visit us at <https://linguistics.unc.edu/>!

II. Course requirements and grading information

Final grades are calculated as follows:

A. Preparation & participation	25%
B. Case-study presentations	30%
C. Midterm exam	20%
D. Final project (multi-part)	25%

Grading scale (*letter* → *number*):

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*

A. Preparation & participation

You will get the most out of this course if you are actively engaged. Plan to **attend** class, complete **preparation** on time, and **participate** in activities and discussion. But because any of us may have health, family, or personal issues that interfere with attendance sometimes, **flexibility** is built into the participation & preparation course component.

- **Participation points:** Expect frequent **preparation questions** (submitted in Canvas before class) and **in-class activities** (completed during class, often as part of a discussion). These are graded pass/fail; each pass earns **one** participation point.
 - *Preparation questions* are graded as a pass if they (a) are complete and (b) show some application of course concepts, even if they are only partly correct. They are often based on a reading assigned for the upcoming class.
 - *In-class activities* are graded as a pass if there is evidence that you participated (this will depend on the type of activity). Some may use PollEverywhere.

Your participation & preparation grade is determined by the percentage of participation points earned out of the total possible, after the lowest 10% of your participation opportunities are dropped. (So if you earn 26/30 points, this would be $26/27 = 96.3\%$.) This allows you to miss several activities with no consequence. For this reason, there are no make-ups for missed preparation questions or in-class activities except in cases of University Approved Absence (see below).

- There is **no grade for attendance** specifically. If you need to miss class for health or other reasons, you do not need to ask permission or explain your absence. But note that you may miss participation activities when you miss class, and remember that it is your responsibility to check the "[Daily syllabus](#)" web page for lecture slides, handouts, and any upcoming preparation or assignments.

Most days, **readings** and/or **online materials** will be assigned as **preparation** for class. In class, we will not simply repeat this information—we will use it and build on it. In order to keep up, you need to be prepared. The **preparation questions** on Canvas (see above) are designed to help you with this, but remember that it is your responsibility to actively think about the assigned readings and other class preparation activities.

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

B. Case-study presentations

The case-study presentations are group presentations related to the language myths we cover in the course. Groups of approximately 4 students will be formed based on your co-working requests and interest in the available topics. Each group will create two presentations (and supporting materials), aimed at different audiences.

Each assignment in this category will be given a letter grade, A–F. The grading criteria will reflect individual contributions as well as the group's overall achievement.

C. Midterm exam

The midterm exam is scheduled for **M Oct 13**. It will be an in-class, closed-book exam that includes both short-answer or application questions and essay questions. (This date may change if there is a significant change to the course schedule, including a class cancellation on F Oct 10 or M Oct 13.)

If you find that you have a conflict with the midterm, please let me know ***in advance*** so that we can schedule a make-up. If you miss the midterm with no advance warning, I cannot guarantee that you will be allowed to make it up, unless you have a University Approved Excused Absence (see below).

D. Final project

This course has a final project rather than a traditional final exam. The project involves identifying a potential language myth, searching the research literature for evidence that can debunk or confirm it, and preparing a final presentation in which you make your argument. Presentations take place during the final-exam period (**F Dec 12**, 12:00–3:00pm). Remember that this is a mandatory part of the course, and changes to your final-exam time can only be made through the official process (see [details](#)).

III. Course policies

A. Collaboration/citation policy for assignments:

- You (or your group, for group assignments) are welcome to discuss assignments with other students (groups) in this course, but you (your group) must write up and submit your work independently.
- If any reference materials other than course readings, handouts, the course web pages, or in-class notes are consulted, you are required to list such outside references in your assignment.

B. Artificial intelligence (AI) use: Use of generative AI tools of any kind is not permitted in this course without explicit instructions in an assignment or written permission from me. Any unauthorized use of generative AI tools will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and will be referred to Student Conduct.

In cases where AI tools are allowed, the following policies apply:

1. AI should help you think, not think for you.
2. Engage responsibly with AI. Evaluate AI-generated outputs for potential biases, limitations, inaccuracies, false output, and ethical implications. Do not put

- personal or confidential data into these tools. Understand that you are ultimately 100% responsible for your final product.
3. The use of AI must be open and documented. Declare, explain, and cite any use of AI in the creation of your work.
 4. If you are unsure about acceptable AI use, check with me. Guidance offered in this syllabus or a specific assignment will be referenced should an issue be referred to Student Conduct for alleged academic misconduct.
- C. 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).
 - D. Recording of class sessions: In general, no audio or video recording of class sessions is permitted in this course. If you have questions or concerns, please talk with me.
 - E. Class absences: See information under II.A. Preparation & participation above and the UNC Attendance Policy below.
 - F. Weather cancellations: Unless University classes are officially canceled, you should assume that our class will be held, but if there is bad weather, 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.
 - G. Changes to the syllabus: I, as your instructor, reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including exam dates (excluding the officially scheduled final examination), if unforeseen circumstances occur. Any changes will be announced as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedules.
 - H. Respect and diversity: I value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. I define diversity broadly to include age, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, language variety, national origin, physical and learning ability, political background, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, social class, veteran status, and other ways in which individuals differ. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students, where we exchange ideas with respect. I welcome suggestions toward these goals. See also the University’s [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#),

Other policies and resources (UNC standard items):

- **Attendance Policy (University 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/short-term military service, 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 [Dean of Students Office](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [University Compliance Office](#)
- **Code of Conduct:** I expect all students to adhere to University policy and follow the guidelines of the UNC Student Code of Conduct. Additional information can be found at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>.

In any course, including mine, what constitutes cheating can change from one activity to another. Please see my guidelines for each activity, and if you are unsure, please ask me to clarify. Don't get caught up with Code of Conduct issues just because getting unauthorized help appears to be simple and untraceable. It is not!

- **Accommodations/University Compliance Office:** The [University Compliance Office \(UCO\) Accommodations Team](#) receives requests for accommodations for disability, pregnancy and related conditions, and sincerely held religious beliefs and practices through the University's Policy on Accommodations. The 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). 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](#).
- Resources for support and learning:
 - [Undergraduate Testing Center](#) — Provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor).
 - [Learning Center](#) — Free, popular programs to help you optimize your academic performance. Try academic coaching, peer tutoring, STEM support, ADHD/LD services, or workshops and study camps. Find tips and tools on their [website](#).
 - [Writing Center](#) — For free feedback on course writing projects. Coaches can assist with any writing project, including multimedia projects and application essays, at any stage of the writing process. You don't even need a draft to come visit. To schedule a 45-minute appointment, review tips, or request written feedback online, visit their [website](#).

IV. Schedule of course topics

The schedule of course topics is available on the course web site, at:
<https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling225/schedule.html>

V. More about linguistics: Reserve readings

Along with our course textbook, the following useful general resources for linguistics are on reserve for this course. See [Course Reserves](#) on our Canvas site.

- *Language Matters*, by Napoli & Lee-Schoenfeld e-book on reserve
- *Patterns in the Mind*, by Ray Jackendoff UNC Libraries P37.J33 1994
- *The Language Instinct*, by Steven Pinker UNC Libraries P106.P476 1994

VI. GenEd learning outcomes and questions for students

Focus Capacity: Ethical and Civic Values

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

- Explain the contexts in which questions of justification arise.
- Assess ethical values in terms of reasons offered.
- Recognize different ethical perspectives and the distinctive approaches these perspectives bring to questions of value, evaluating ethical justifications for different ways of organizing civic and political communities.
- Analyze the differences between personal ethical decisions and those bearing on the public and civic spheres.

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

- How can people think fruitfully (individually and together) about how they should live their lives?
- What is required to judge a standard or value as worthy of support?
- How should we distinguish between prejudices and reasonable grounds for value judgments?
- What considerations — stories, reasons, testimony, documents, data, etc. — can justify our values and commitments, whether personal or social?

Focus Capacity: Ways of Knowing

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

- Recognize and use one or more approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.
- Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.
- Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.
- Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.
- Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

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

- What norms and expectations do I take for granted?
- What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?
- What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?
- How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?