

Experimental Syntax (Tentative Syllabus)

	Course Info
Course#	LING 5981/6080
Semester	Spring 2024
Time	TuTh 9:10AM - 10:30AM
Location	LNCO 2945
Website	Canvas
Prerequisites	Some Syntax
	Instructor Info
Instructor	Aniello De Santo
Pronouns	He/His/Him
Email	aniello.desanto@utah.edu
Department	Linguistics
Office	LNCO 2315/Zoom
Office hours	TuTh 11:00AM - 12:00PM (tentative) (See the "Office hours" section for more info)

N.B. Since the class size this semester is small-ish, we will negotiate some of these components together the first week of classes. The syllabus in its current form is more to give you an idea of course content (also to be discussed together, I am very willing to adapt content based on your interests), and my personal pedagogical mindset!

Catalog description

This is a first course in experimental syntax. The goal is to teach students how to think about syntactic data like an experimentalist, and engage in cutting-edge debates about what experimental evidence can tell us about syntactic theory. The course will be hands-on: We will discuss experimental design, data visualization, statistical analysis, and the application of experimental methods to theoretical questions. For the first two thirds, we will work through an example acceptability judgment experiment from design to analysis (using R). The final third will be more like a seminar, as we discuss the ways that experimental work can contribute to syntactic theory. While the course is not a statistical methods course, we will stress the connection between experimental design and data analysis.

Goals and Objectives

- Conceptualize syntactic questions as an experimentalist
- Design, deploy, and understand the outcome of acceptability judgment experiments
- Ability to independently approach broader experimental literature/master experimental tools
- Ability to think about the connection between experimental design and statistical analysis
- General familiarity with experimental methods in linguistics and psycholinguistics
- General familiarity with cutting-edge debates about what (formal) experimental evidence can tell us about syntactic theory

What do you need to succeed?

- Willingness to play around with unfamiliar tools, and get "your hands dirty"
- Willingness to read/explore state-of-the-art work and engage with current debates in the field

What this course is not/does not replace

- A statistical analysis course (although we will do some)
- A programming course (although we will do some)
- A broader experimental methods course (although I will try my best to cover the fundamentals)

Prerequisites

An introduction to syntax at the graduate or undergraduate level.

Required Materials and Resources

This course will work best if you bring a laptop with you to the class so that you can work along with the slides and discussion. If you anticipate tech-related issues, please get in touch with me as soon as possible in the semester. I can help you figure something out/find the right resources! For example, if you do not have access to a laptop, there are offices at the University of Utah that allow you to borrow one.

What else do you need?

We are going to use Excel and R extensively in this course, so you should have them installed on your computer. Here are some links:

- A spreadsheet program such as Excel or Calc. If you don't have one, you can download OpenOffice for free.
- The R programming language. I highly recommend using the **R Studio** interface for working with R.
- The following packages for R: tidyverse, lmerTest. To install these, simply open R Studio or the R console (whichever you chose), type the following command into the console window, and press enter: **install.packages(c("tidyverse", "lmerTest"))**. The tidyverse package will install several packages simultaneously (tidyR, dplyR, ggplot2) that we will use throughout the course. If we need other packages throughout the semester, I will show you how to install them.

Ensure you have these by the **end of the first week of classes**, as they will be required to complete assignments and activities throughout the course. If you have trouble installing R Studio or any of the required packages, come to office hours and I will help you out!

Textbook, data and scripts

- All class materials will be distributed on Canvas (you can familiarize yourself with Canvas [here](#)).
- No book is required for this course, but I will rely heavily on lecture notes made available by [Jon Sproule](#) and [Brian Dillon](#)--- who I thank for making their materials available. I will provide them on Canvas as we move through the semester.
- I will also extract some readings from the [Oxford Handbook of Experimental Syntax](#). I will make those readings available on Canvas, but physical and Digital copies of the book should also be available in the Library.

Discord Channel

To facilitate remote discussion/collaboration among peers with limited in person contact, I encourage you to create informal channels for group collaboration. For example, Discord is a collaborative chatroom environment extensively used for Team synchronization in the tech industry. You can create a free account.

Grading

It is my belief that grades should be mostly an instrument for you to get feedback about how much I think you are internalizing the materials. Please try not to take assignments as a war between you and me, but as a way for you to take the best out of the course. Because of this, each assignment is going to include a self-reflection component, that I am going to take into account while grading.

Student grades are determined by the following components:

- **Weekly homework (20%)**. Unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due before the start of class the following week. They will consist of reading reports, reflections on what discussed in class, or practice in creating experimental materials/playing around with R scripts. Most of the work will be done in class, with assignment exercises only meant to help you solidify your knowledge.
 - **Late Submissions**: Life is messy (especially these days)! While I encourage you to do assignments on time due to the incremental nature of the materials, I generally adopt a flexible deadline approach: if you think you are going to be late on an assignment, just let me know and we can figure things out. I do not need doctor's notes or complicated reasons (in fact, I do not need to know why at all)! Just let me know you need an extension. I trust you to not abuse this policy.
- **Class Self-reflections (10%)**
 - I will distribute a survey about your background and expectations for this class during the first week. You get credits just for submitting this (as long as you wrote something, of course!)
 - I will distribute a survey about what you think of your own development and performance in this course during the last week of classes. You get credits just for submitting this (as long as you wrote something, of course!)

Self-assessment is not a rhetorical exercise, please take it seriously! It is meant for you to engage actively/critically with your learning experience, and for me to get a different/well-rounded view of your experience as a student beyond your quantitative performance.

Class participation (40%)

This is an hand-on course, so in-class participation is (in my opinion) essential to learning. This portion of the grade is also a way for me to give you credit for informal/unstructured collaborative work that you do. Participation and collaboration are strong predictors of success and learning retention, so please make an effort to find a way that works well for you to participate and engage with your colleagues. There are many ways you can do so. Some examples:

- Complete "in class" activities
- Post questions on the Canvas discussion board
- Share links or resources on the Canvas discussion board
- Answer your peers' questions on the Canvas discussion board
- Come to office hours (group or individual)
- Form a study group with your peers
- Email questions to the instructor
- Ask questions during lecture or discussion section
- Volunteer answers to peer questions during lecture or discussion section

For the graded component of your participation, at the end of the semester I will ask you to self-assess your level of participation. This part of the grade is intended to help you identify what strategies help you learn, and plan ways you can grow and improve in the future.

Scholarly Engagement (5%)

Learning goes beyond simply memorizing notions from class. By taking courses at the University, you are a full-fledged scholar, which means it is important to engage with scholarly communities more broadly. Because of this, I require you attend at least one event outside of our scheduled class lectures, related to the contents of the course.

This semester we will have 3 invited talks for our prospective new computational linguistics hire. I strongly encourage you to attend those, and you can use one of them towards this credit portion of the course.

You are also very welcome to suggest your own event (and share them with the class). Events not listed by me must be approved beforehand, but I am generally flexible!

To receive credit you have to write a 1 page (typed single-spaced) summary of what the talk was about, including your general opinions on the presentation. Comments do not have to pertain to the scientific content of the talk (although that is obviously welcome) but can be (respectfully) about presentation style/clarity/etc. This report is officially due on the last day of class, but may be turned in on Canvas as soon as it is complete.

Participate in a linguistic study (5%)

To sign up for a linguistic study, please visit: <http://speechlab.utah.edu/participate.php>. **Note that you are strongly encouraged to sign up early, rather than wait to the end of the semester to participate.** If for any reason you do not prefer comfortable participating in Linguistics studies for credit in this course, an alternative assignment will be made available. If you need accommodation of any kind, have a question about accommodation, and/or prefer to complete an alternative assignment for any reason, please create a Sona account and then email at speechacquisitionlab@gmail.com. Arrangements for alternative assignments must be made before the current semester's add/drop deadline. If no study appointments are available, check back later, as new appointments are added periodically. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the Linguistics Study Pool or the Sona sign-up system, please contact the Linguistic Study Pool coordinators at speechacquisitionlab@gmail.com.

You have to participate to one experiment to fulfill this mandatory component of the grade. You can additionally participate to a second one and earn extra-credit points.

- **For students in 5981. Lead a paper discussion (20%)**. The last 1/3 of the semester will be dedicated to discussions of recent literature about (or making use of) acceptability judgments. Each student will be assigned a reading, and they will be in charge of leading the relevant discussion. Guidelines will be provided later in the semester.
- **For students in 6080. Lead a paper discussion (10%; see description above) + Propose a study (10%)**. Study proposals should be written in the form of a registered report, following the guidelines provided by Glossa Psycholinguistics (https://escholarship.org/uc/glossapsycholinguistics/types_of_article, see also <https://www.cos.io/initiatives/registered-reports/>). Students are encouraged to come talk with me about their ideas as early in the semester as possible (but not later than week 8 or 9) so that they can receive feedback on the appropriateness and feasibility of the concept.

University of Utah Grading Scale

Letter Scoring

A	100% - 94%
A-	93.9% - 90%
B+	89.9%–87%
B	86.9%–84%
B-	83.9% - 80%
C+	79.9%–77%
C	76.9%–74%
C-	73.9% - 70%
D+	69.9%–67%
D	66.9%–64%
D-	63.9% - 60%
E	59.9%–0%

Tentative Schedule

Week	Topic
1	Introduction: Why Experimental Syntax
2	Items
3	Judgment Tasks
4	Building a Likert-Scale Experiment in Ihex
5	Analyzing Results: Preprocessing, Plotting
6	Analyzing Results: Linear-Mixed Effects Models
7	Fisher, F, and p; Neyman-Pearson
8	Analyzing Results: Ordinal Models
9 - 15	Readings Based Discussions

The last part of the semester (weeks 9-15) will be structured like a topic-based seminar. Some potential topics: Validity and replicability of judgments, Criteria for distinguishing syntax from general constraints on language processing, Acceptability judgments and fieldwork, etc. I am happy to integrate readings on topics of special interest to students in the class.

Topics and deadlines are tentative and might be changed as the semester progresses.

Covid Policies

I hope we can all collaborate to create an environment that is safe for everyone in our class and broader communities. I welcome suggestions that can help maximize what you get out of this course while minimizing risks to you (and your families!) mental and physical health. For my part, I make these commitments to you, and encourage you to do the same:

Staying home and Testing

- I will not come to class sick (this should be true independently of COVID! Please take care of yourselves!). I will work with you to arrange ways to attend the class virtually and catch up on missed materials.
- Look over [this list of common COVID symptoms](#) if you are unsure, and stay home if you have any of these in a way that is uncommon for you.

General Policies

Contacting me

- Emails should be sent to aniello.desanto@utah.edu
- Please put LING 3300 into the subject of the email, and *never* leave the subject empty!
- Reply time <= 24h in simple cases, possibly more if meddling with bureaucracy is involved.
- We will discuss the format for office hours the first day of classes.

Office Hours

- Office hours will take place twice per week either in my office in LNCO, or in a dedicated Zoom room (link available on Canvas).
- You do not need to schedule an appointment for these, you can just show up (but an heads up is welcome if you anticipate a long discussion).
- Extra office hours are also always available by appointment.

A Note on Office hours

You might feel like you need to have a specific question (e.g., about a homework) in order to come to office hours. This is *not* true. **Office hours are a space for us to discuss any issue/concern you might be having with the class, and you are always welcome regardless of whether you have a precise question or not.** Thus, you also do not need an appointment to show up to office hours. However, if you anticipate a longer meeting, it might be helpful for you to email me in advance so that we can set apart enough time and avoid collisions with other students.

Laptop policy

This course requires laptops use during class (if you have tech problems, please contact me in advance). I recommend that you avoid using your laptop in class for activities that are not directly related to the lecture. However, I do not enforce restrictions on how to use laptops. Note that cognitive scientists are still debating how/whether laptop use in the classroom is related to test scores:

- Raviza, S. M., Uirtvlugt, M. G., & Fenn, K. M. (2016). *Logged in and zoned out: How laptop Internet use relates to classroom learning*. Psychological Science, 28(2), 171–180.
- Urry Heather L. et al (2020). *Don't Ditch the Laptop Just Yet: A Direct Replication of Mueller and Oppenheimer's (2014) Study 1 Plus Mini-Meta-Analyses Across Similar Studies*

Since we all have different needs, these are just recommendations. You can do as you please, as long as you are not disruptive to the class.

Attendance

Attendance is **not** required. Students may elect not to attend class in-person with no penalty. However, in order to get the best out of the course, I strongly recommend consistent attendance. In fact, if you feel like attending class is useless, I'd rather you let me know so that I can improve my lectures! Also, please get in touch with me if you have any problems you feel I can help with. Accommodations to participate online, rather than in-person, can be discussed but the classroom we will be in does not make synchronous zoom meetings easy.

Names/Pronouns.

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as *Preferred first name* (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account, which managed can be managed at any time). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class or on assignments. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun are respected. If you need any assistance or support, please reach out to the LGBT Resource Center: https://glbt.utah.edu/campus/faculty_resources.php

Accommodations

Accommodations will be considered on an individual basis and may require documentation.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability & Access, 162 Oldpin Union Building, 801-581-5020. CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability & Access. The website for the Center for Disability and Access: <https://disability.utah.edu>

Extreme personal circumstances

Please contact your instructor as soon as possible if an extreme personal circumstance (hospitalization, death of a close relative, natural disaster, etc.) is interfering with your ability to complete your work.

Religious Practice

To request an accommodation for religious practices, contact your instructor at the beginning of the semester.

Active Duty Military

If you are student on active duty with the military and experience issues that prevent you from participating in the course because of deployment or service responsibilities, contact your instructor as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

A personal note on diversity and accessibility

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture.

I also aim to maximize accessibility for all my lecture materials. However, it is probable that I miss or underestimate some issues. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated.

Please let me know to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students/know groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

University Policies

Drop/Withdraw Policies

Students may drop a course within the first two weeks of a given semester without any penalties.

Students may officially withdraw (W) from a class or all classes after the drop deadline through the midpoint of a course. A "W" grade is recorded on the transcript and appropriate tuition/fees are assessed. The grade "W" is not used in calculating the student's GPA.

For deadlines to withdraw from full-term, and second session classes, see the U's Academic Calendar.

Plagiarism and Cheating

It is assumed that all work submitted to your instructor is your own work. When you have used ideas of others, you must properly indicate that you have done so.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code, "includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information...It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or helping to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct."

- For the purpose of this class, use of LLM based text prediction software (e.g. ChatGPT) for purposes beyond spell-checking is considered as plagiarism. This goes to code-generation too. I invite you to educate yourselves about the hugely problematic issues underlying such approaches (<https://rixintanooj.com/2022/12/29/against-automated-plagiarism/>, and <https://evijacobs.notion.site/Why-ChatGPT-is-bad-for-open-psycholinguistics-6acbc833bb44414aa2fa8c648af95d7f>). I am happy to have a discussion about this with any of you, if of interest. Ultimately, you are adults and scholars, and you are responsible for the tools you use in your scientific activities.

For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U's Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Course Materials Copyright

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Please see the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Section III.A.5 regarding use and distribution of class Content and materials. <https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php> Section III.A.5. prohibits the following: Sale or distribution of information representing the work product of a faculty member to a commercial entity for financial gain without the express written permission of the faculty member responsible for the course. ("Work product" means original works of authorship that have been fixed in a tangible medium and any works based upon and derived from the original work of authorship.)

Safety at the U

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message.

For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.

To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, contact: Campus Police & Department of Public Safety, 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677), dps.utah.edu

Wellness at the U

Your personal health and wellness are essential to your success as a student. Personal concerns like stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, or cross-cultural differences can interfere with a student's ability to please and thrive in this course and at the University of Utah.

Please feel welcome to reach out to your instructor or TA's to handle issues regarding your coursework.

For helpful resources to manage your personal wellness and counseling options, contact: wellness.utah.edu or womenscenter.utah.edu

Addressing Sexual Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

Campus Safety

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.

Changes to the Syllabus

This syllabus is not a contract. It is meant to serve as an outline and guide for your course. Please note that your instructor may modify it to accommodate the needs of your class.

You will be notified of any changes to the Syllabus.