

Language, Mind and Thought: An Introduction to Cognitive Science

Fall 2024

ILAS/ENGL/ANTH 261

TTh 2:00 PM - 3:15 PM

LAT-201

1. Basic information

1.1. Instructor. Dr. Reva Freedman

1.2. Email address. rfreedman@niu.edu

1.3. Office hours. Wed 1:30-4:00 PM in PM-554. If you would like to have a private conversation, I would be happy to make an appointment with you with a couple of days notice. I usually can't satisfy last-minute requests.

1.4. Course web sites. The course web site is <http://www.cs.niu.edu/~freedman/cogs/>. Most course materials will be on Blackboard under ILAS 261, regardless of the number under which you are registered.

1.5. Course goals. Functioning of the human mind from the perspectives of anthropology, computer science, linguistics, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychology. Interdisciplinary consideration of perception, language, reasoning, artificial intelligence, culture, and models of cognition.

This course is offered for General Education credit. This course is based on general education goal C, under which "students develop an understanding of the interrelatedness of various disciplines by integrating knowledge from several disciplines and applying that knowledge to an understanding of important problems and issues."

2. Communication

2.1. In person. I will be happy to talk to you about questions or concerns at any time, including any topic relating to this course, artificial intelligence or computer science in general. I am also happy to talk to you about personal or career issues to the extent that I can be helpful. I encourage you to address small problems before they become big problems, not the day before the exam.

2.2. Announcements. Late-breaking news, e.g., errors in assignments, weather emergencies, and any other type of emergency, will be posted on Blackboard. Blackboard announcements will also be sent to your NIU email if you have the correct settings set. Personal messages will be sent to your NIU email. I suggest you check both every morning.

2.3. University announcements. If the university is closed for weather or other reasons, please check Blackboard and your email to see whether class will be held on Zoom or cancelled.

3. Email

I triage email to be as helpful as possible to you. Therefore emails that you can answer from other sources will have the lowest priority.

3.1. Relevant email. I appreciate emails discussing bugs in assignments, suggestions for class, useful information, interesting articles, and similar things. I may not answer email if the answer can be obtained elsewhere. If the answer to your question is in the syllabus, check the syllabus first. If you miss class, you are expected to find out what was covered from another student. If you have a reference question, Google it first.

3.2. Email response schedule. I try to respond to email by the next business day. That means that an email you send on Tuesday should be answered no later than Wednesday. I also generally check my email once on Sunday in order to start the week without a backlog.

3.3. Do not send pictures of text. *Do not send pictures of text, i.e., copy and paste the text instead.* Questions requiring major assistance are usually best handled in person.

3.4. Do not send duplicate emails. There is no need to send email to more than one email address; my email addresses all forward to the same place. Don't send a second copy of an email if you haven't given me time to answer the first one.

4. Resources

4.1. Attendance. Attendance is required in order to form a learning community. In addition, much of the material is not easily available elsewhere. I will not explicitly take attendance. However, there will be unannounced in-class assignments that, in total, will count 20% of your course grade. Longer assignments will count more. There will be enough assignments that you can miss two and still receive full credit toward your class grade. There are no makeup assignments. If you arrive after the assignment, you have missed the assignment.

4.2. Class material. You are responsible for all material covered in class. If you miss a class, you must get notes from another student before the next class, *not from the instructor*. Research has shown that students who attend class regularly do better regardless of other behaviors.

4.3. Blackboard. Slides used in class will be posted at some point after the lectures in which they are used. Although many or most class materials will be posted on Blackboard, that is for your convenience. This is *not* an online class, and there is no assumption that you can learn everything without coming to class.

4.4. Class participation. Class participation is encouraged and will make the class more interesting for you and for other students. If you have a question, there are probably three other people with the same question who are even more shy than you.

Please ask ASAP if you don't understand, if I make a mistake, if you are curious about the utility of an idea or its application, or if you are just curious about something. Questions about details, big ideas, concepts, algorithms, examples, related ideas and applications are all welcome.

5. Out-of-class assignments

5.1. Out-of-class assignments. There will be occasional out-of-class assignments, such as watching a video or trying an experiment at home.

5.2. Due dates. Due dates for out-of-class assignments will be announced on Blackboard when the assignment is posted. *No assignments will be accepted late.* I suggest you submit your

assignments by 11:58 PM on the day they are due to make sure they are received on time. In general, there are no waivers or extensions for late assignments.

5.3. Submission rules. All assignmentss must be submitted according to the format specified on the assignment sheet.

5.4. Administrative penalties. There will be an administrative penalty for not following directions, e.g., not following naming conventions or not submitting in the correct format.

5.5. Naming conventions. Every student will be assigned a FLID (“four-letter ID”). Make sure that all quizzes, assignments and exams contain your 4-letter ID as well as the quiz, assignment or exam number.

Make sure that assignments submitted on Blackboard use the naming convention specified in the assignment, which includes your 4-letter ID and the assignment number. The naming convention is case-sensitive. For files, your 4-letter id is always lower case. For quizzes and exams, it is upper case.

5.6. Grading criteria. Every assignment will include a rubric stating how points will be assigned.

5.7. Grade correction deadline. If you believe your assignment has been graded incorrectly, you must see the instructor within one week after the grades have been posted.

6. Exams

6.1. Date of midterms. There will be two midterms. They are currently scheduled for Tue., Sept. 24 and Tue., Oct. 29. I do not expect to change these dates, but if it becomes necessary, it will be announced in class and the online schedule will be updated.

6.2. Date of final exam. The final exam will be on the date scheduled by the registrar at <https://www.niu.edu/registration-records/dates/exams/index.shtml> under Standard Exams, namely Tue., Dec. 10, 2-3:50 PM. In exceptional cases, such as another Covid shutdown or a weather emergency, changes may be made to the exam schedule or format.

6.3. Form and content of exams. Exams will include material from the lecture notes and assignments. The exams will be traditional closed-book, closed-notes exam. Exam formats may include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer questions and related formats. Questions will assume that you have not only done the homework but learned from it, i.e., copying answers from the slides without understanding may give you the correct answer but is less likely to give you the level of understanding you will need for the exams.

6.4. Academic integrity policy for exams. Exams will be conducted in accordance with the department’s academic integrity policy, which is available on the course web site.

6.5. Cumulative aspects of exams. Exams will not be cumulative. Each exam will cover one section of the course material.

6.6. Review sheets for exams. For each exam, a review sheet will be posted listing all the possible conceptual questions (in a somewhat different format).

6.7. No makeup exams (in general). You are expected to take the exams on the assigned time and date. Missing an exam is an extremely serious matter: makeup midterm exams will only be given if *all* of the following requirements are satisfied: (a) an unavoidable reason (e.g., car accident), (b) advance notification, (c) written documentation, (d) permission of instructor. For a makeup final exam, all of the above are required in addition to permission of the department.

6.8. University final exam rule. Please notify me if you meet the university's criterion for rescheduling a final exam, namely that you have three finals on the same day and this course is the highest-numbered of the three. A makeup final can also be given if you have two overlapping finals. If the conflict results from another instructor changing the assigned time, that instructor is responsible for the makeup exam. The university deadline for scheduling a makeup final is Monday of the last week of classes. A printout of your schedule will be required.

7. Grade calculation

Each homework will be assigned a point count according to difficulty and the amount of time required. Grades will be calculated as follows: Exams 80% (26 2/3% each) and assignments (both in- and outside of class) 20%. Grades will not be curved or rounded. Grades will be calculated according to the following schedule:

Grade	Average
A	≥ 90
A-	≥ 89
B+	≥ 88
B	≥ 80
B-	≥ 79
C+	≥ 78
C	≥ 70
D	≥ 60
F	< 60

8. Classroom decorum

"No activity that interferes with learning, i.e., one that may distract other students or the instructor, is permitted in class. For example, eating, talking (whether in person or on the phone), newspaper reading, and regularly being late or leaving early are not permitted.

Research has shown that activities such as texting and checking your email interfere with *your* retention of the material, however, they in general do not interfere with other people's ability to concentrate. Thus if you need to communicate with colleagues during class, texting and email are excellent ways to do so. Please do not sit in the front row if you intend to engage in these activities, as it is distracting.

9. Special circumstances

9.1. Types of special circumstances. Students with special needs (disability accommodation, religious observances, required military service, major illness or other unexpected events) are encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as possible. I am always willing to talk to students.

There is a specific section on disability accommodations below.

9.2. Non-special circumstances. Having a lot of work for your other classes, being busy at your job, and network problems are *not* special circumstances; they are normal circumstances that everyone has.

10. Disability accommodations

The instructor will provide all of the accommodations to which you are entitled by law.

If you need an accommodation for this class, you must provide a notification letter from the Disability Resource Center. Once you provide a copy of the notification letter, we will have a private conference to determine how your approved accommodations will be handled in this class. This conference must be held and agreement reached before any accommodations can take effect. No accommodations will be allowed retroactively.

If you wish to take your exams at the DRC office, you must also follow DRC schedule regulations. Since the exam dates have been announced, you can schedule them all now.

For these reasons you should contact the DRC as soon as possible. They are located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu. Also, please contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss possible accommodations – there is no need to wait until you have received the notification letter.

11. Academic integrity

You are encouraged to study together, however, that does not mean doing assignments together. Do the assignments yourself.

You are expected to do your own work on assignments and exams. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying work from other students, copying work from other textbooks, copying work from the Internet, or allowing others to do the same, whether deliberately or not.

You may not post material from this class, including answers to the homework assignments, on any public web site.

All cheating will result in the filing of an academic misconduct form and will affect your course grade, with the possibility of failing the course and/or losing your student job. The penalty for a first offense is usually two letter grades. Note that a second academic misconduct offense may result in your expulsion from the university.

We may use mechanized source comparison on the assignments.