

PHIL 353 - LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

Fall 2020

Instructor: Megan Hyska	Time: T,Th 12:30-1:50
Email: megan.hyska@northwestern.edu	Place: Online

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 9-10am appointment required, and by alternative arrangement.

Course Materials: All materials will be made available on Canvas.

Course Description and Objectives: This course is concerned with the way that the meaning of the words we utter shapes, and is shaped by, the environment in which they are used. We will be investigating different ways of modeling this environment or “context”, as well as the idea that at least some terms or expressions are “context-sensitive” (as well as problems for this suggestion), the way that we can communicate more than what the words we use strictly entail, and how all this might come together in a theory of a linguistic phenomenon as mysterious as metaphor. Note that it is recommended that students in this course have taken prior course work in linguistics, logic, or philosophy of language. This course aims to develop the capacity for critical reasoning and further the related [learning objectives of the Northwestern philosophy program](#).

Course Format: This class is being taught via synchronous online instruction. Asynchronous accommodations may be arranged on a case-by-case basis by contacting the instructor, where a pressing need exists (e.g. you are living in a timezone such that our class time would be in the middle of your night). Asynchronous accommodations will not be granted on the basis of a time conflict with other classes.

Course Outline:

DATE READINGS AND COURSEWORK

01.12 Introduction, No readings

01.14 David Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”

01.19 Robert Stalnaker, excerpt from “Context”

01.21 Class Cancelled

01.26 Daniel Harris, “We Talk to People, not Contexts”

01.28 Craige Roberts, excerpt from, “Speech Acts in Discourse Context”

02.02 continued

02.04 Elisabeth Camp, “Insinuation, Common Ground, and the Conversational Record”

02.09 continued

02.11	David Kaplan, excerpt from “Demonstratives”
02.16	continued
02.18	Marga Reimer, “Demonstratives, Demonstrations, and Demonstrata”
02.23	Keith DeRose, “Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions”
02.25	continued
03.02	Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore, excerpt from “Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism”
03.04	continued
03.09	Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” t
03.11	continued

Grade breakdown:

- Final Paper 40%
- Weekly Problem Sets 45%
- Participation 15%

Assignments:*Problem Sets*

Rather than having a traditional midterm exam, this class will examine your grasp of the last week’s material through problem sets that will be posted by 5pm every Friday (starting 01.22) and which are due by 12 on Tuesday. Problem sets should be completed by yourself, without collaboration from other students in the class.

Final Paper

A final 2000-2500 word paper is due **March 15th, 11:59 pm**. Suggested paper topics will be handed out by February 11th. Undergraduates are welcome to choose one of these or meet with the instructor to propose a different topic.

Any enrolled graduate students should write a longer (3000 word+) paper. They will be assigned a different topic than those listed for undergraduates, in conversation with instructor.

All students will hand in an outline of their final paper by 02.25, and will be responsible for completing a peer-review of a fellow student’s outline (which will be assigned to you) by 03.04. The quality of your peer review will make up 10% of your Final Paper grade.

Attendance and Participation:

- Unless you make alternative arrangements with the instructor (see below), this is a synchronous class, requiring your attendance and participation 12:30-1:50 every Tuesday and Thursday.

- Unless you make alternative arrangements with the instructor, attendance requires being **online** for the entirety of the class period, and turning your camera on at least when in breakout rooms.
- Every student is granted 2 freebies– this means you get two asynchronous class periods over the course of the quarter without excuse, with the expectation that you will watch the video of the missed class period before the following class period to catch up. Synchronous attendance with camera off, if not pre-cleared with instructor, will count as an absence and so use one of these freebies. Further missed course meetings may be excused by the instructor, but require advance notice.
- You will earn your participation grade in 2 ways:
 1. by engaging in in-class discussion
 2. by submitting a thoughtful, high-quality question concerning that day's reading via the dedicated discussion thread on Canvas before class.
- If at any point in the quarter you want to check in on your participation grade, by all means shoot me an e-mail or make an appointment to chat about it.
- If your circumstances require an asynchronous accommodation (e.g. you are living in a timezone such that our class time would be in the middle of your night), please reach out to the instructor ASAP. If your accommodation request is approved, you will be required to agree to an alternative set of participation requirements.

Academic Integrity: If you plagiarize or otherwise cheat on any assignment you will receive a zero on that assignment and be referred to the college's disciplinary body. Note that it is your responsibility to make sure you know what plagiarism consists of and that ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism will not be considered a legitimate excuse in the event of an infraction. If you need help figuring out how to responsibly cite something, please ask your instructor or refer to [NUWrite's list of helpful resources](#).

Students with Disabilities: Any student with a disability requesting accommodations should register with Services for Students with Disabilities (ssd@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and present an accommodation letter from SSD to their professor, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.