

490: Research Methods in Linguistics

Fall 2018, Wednesdays, 4:00–5:50pm, DOW 321

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This course is for seniors who major in Linguistics, and has two main goals. The first one is to train you to do research in linguistics, and facilitate the process of writing your senior essay. This means that your main tasks will be to take the necessary steps that will lead you to produce your own piece of research, which overall include

1. identifying a research area,
2. identifying a research topic within this area, and an advisor,
3. acquiring the background knowledge you need,
4. formulating a research question,
5. formulating a hypothesis,
6. testing your hypothesis,
7. examining and evaluating the results.

The second goal is to help you develop professional skills that are useful for your future, such as writing abstracts, research statements and proposals more generally.

Course Requirements

There are two basic requirements for this course:

1. Work on your research topic, following all the steps and handing in the assigned work on time.
2. Attend class, and participate. I expect active participation from all members of the class, both discussing your own work and giving feedback to others.

Grades will be determined according to the following percentages:

written work	60%
oral presentations	20%
comments to peers	10%
class attendance	10%

Course Outline

1. Setting our goals (August 31st)

2. The structure of a research paper (September 5th)

Assignment 1 due: Read two senior essays and report on them in writing. You can find hard copies in LingSem and online at: <https://ling.yale.edu/alumni-senior-essays>. Your reports must include

- an introductory paragraph outlining the research question(s) addressed in the essay,
- a description of the methodology used,
- the hypothesis put forth by the author (if there is one),
- a description of the major findings/results/conclusions reached,
- a brief evaluation of the methodology and findings.

Suggested length: one and a half to two pages per report.

3. Presenting oneself and one's interests (September 12th)

Assignment 2 due:

- study the websites of at least six Linguistics Departments that offer a PhD in linguistics; include the Yale PhD program in your list.
- write a statement about your research interests (aka personal statement, or statement of purpose), as if you were applying to one of those departments.

Even if you don't plan on going to graduate school, writing a statement of purpose is good practice. Use this opportunity to reflect on your time at Yale.

Suggested length: 2 pages.

4. Linguistics and its sub-fields: goals and methodologies (September 19th)

Assignment 3 due: By now, everyone will have chosen an area of research (though not necessarily a topic). Write two pages in which you

- describe the object of investigation of the sub-field you chose,
- mention some case studies,
- discuss the kind of methodology used, and
- say why this is important to linguistics and to human knowledge more broadly.

5. Essential readings on your research topic (September 26th)

Assignment 4 due:

- (a) meet with your advisor(s). Make sure to get at least half an hour of their time! Send everyone a selfie as proof of your meeting;
- (b) make a written list of references relevant to your topic (5-10 entries), with full bibliographical details.

NB: Please format references as shown in the [Unified style sheet for linguistics](#).

6. Literature Review (October 3th)

Assignment 5 due: Write a brief review of at least two of the articles you have chosen. The review of the two articles should be carefully written and should contain

- (a) an introductory paragraph that outlines the main issues discussed in the paper;
- (b) a clear statement of the main linguistic intuition that underlies the proposal;
- (c) a discussion of the kind of evidence brought in support of the proposal;
- (d) a concluding paragraph with a brief summary and (possibly) an evaluation.

Some helpful questions to ask yourselves:

- What is the big question of the paper?
- What are the concrete puzzles and gaps in knowledge that stimulated it?
- What are the main insights encoded in the theory?
- What questions have been answered?
- What new ones have appeared?
- How does the theory account for the major puzzles or facts?
- If you were to continue this research, what would you do next?

7. Class presentations of individual research topics (October 10th)

Assignment 6 due: Write at least two pages (plus references) on the topic of your senior essay. Your write up should include the following (not necessarily in this order):

- The faculty member(s) you'll be working with.
- A description of the puzzle you plan to investigate.
- How you will investigate the topic. (What methodology will you use? What equipment or resources, if relevant? Will you need IRB approval?)
- Why you chose that topic (that is, why is this question interesting?)
- Potential problems you see in the topic.
- If you want to do an experiment, some information about the protocol.
- Background references (some of which you have from Assignment 4).

8. Decide what the next step ought to be (October 24)

Assignment 8 due: At this point, you each need to start doing research, but the first step is different for each of you. For the fall break, please do the following:

- (a) by this Saturday (October 13), take some time to decide what the next two or three steps in your research ought to be, and upload a statement that says what you plan to do by the next time we meet (October 24th).
- (b) by October 24, take a look at what everyone sends in, and write at least a comment on each submission.

9. Applying for graduate programs, internships or jobs. (October 31st)

Assignment 8 due: Choose one of the following options:

- (a) If you're preparing a personal statement (because you're applying to graduate school, or for a job), make that your assignment for this week (i.e., write a statement about your interests, career goals, why you would like to enter a graduate program or get the job for which you're applying).
- (b) Otherwise, choose two articles relevant for your senior essay and write a review for each of them (as you did in assignment 5).

10. What is your hypothesis? does it make testable predictions? (November 7th)

Assignment 9 due: Write 2 pages in which you

- (a) Describe the question you plan to investigate, using the relevant data to illustrate it;
- (b) formulate a hypothesis for the question you have chosen to investigate, and state it as precisely as possible;
- (c) state the predictions that your hypothesis makes as precisely as possible.

11. Grouping ideas into families (November 14th)

Assignment 10 due: Read some of the literature on the topic that you selected, and

- (a) identify "families of approaches" to the puzzle you're investigating;
- (b) think about the pro's and con's of each one;
- (c) write a report that outlines these different approaches to your topic and contains an overall evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses.

12. Detailed outline (or skeleton) of your senior essay (November 28th).

Assignment 11 due: Prepare a detailed outline of your senior essay. To do so, you need to think about what you need to write, and how you should organize what you need to write. Divide the content that you envision into sections, each of which may contain subsections. Make sure that the section titles are informative!

Once you have written an outline, put together a document that contains the following (the outline is new, most of the rest you already have):

- (a) a title page for your essay;
- (b) a detailed list of the section and subsections that you envision;
- (c) a statement of your hypothesis/goals (the one you prepared two weeks ago);
- (d) in the section where you discuss the background for your project, include the literature reviews that you have written for previous assignments;
- (e) a bibliography (the list of references you have prepared for previous assignments).

This will constitute the skeleton of your senior essay. Over the next few months, you'll add material around this structure.

13. First draft of senior essay (December 5th).

Assignment 12 due: Think about what you've already done and what you need to do next, and write it down as a list of tasks. In addition, polish the document you've been working on. Hand in a copy as the final work for this course, and a copy to your advisor. The document should contain:

- a title page;
- an abstract (even though it's not the final one);
- a detailed list of the section and subsections that you envision;
- a statement of your hypothesis/goals;
- some writing in at least some of the sections;
- a bibliography (even though it's not the final one)
- a detailed list of the tasks ahead of you, with a timeline (an estimate of when you'll do them and how long each will take you).

Make sure that the titles of the sections are informative, and that the bibliography follows the required style.

Major deadlines:

1. Fall:

- October 3th: Choose your advisor(s)
- October 10th: settle on a topic
- November 14th: write an abstract about your research topic;
- December 5th: hand in a document containing the detailed structure of you senior essay, with content in at least some of the sections. This is a real first rough draft, which will be the basis of your work for the months to come.

2. Spring:

- March 8th: First full written draft due to your advisor(s)
- April 12th: Final draft due to your advisor(s)
- April 24th: one electronic copy and one bound copy due to the Linguistics Department

Snack schedule

1. September 5th:
2. September 12th:
3. September 19th:
4. September 26th:
5. October 3th:
6. October 10th:
7. October 24th:
8. October 31st:
9. November 7th:
10. November 14th:
11. November 28th:
12. December 5th:

Dinner with all seniors and their advisors: April 24th.