

**Intro to Philosophy of Language**  
Rutgers University    01:730:210  
Spring 2022  
MW 2:00 - 3:20              FH-A1 / Zoom

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<https://mikedeigan.com/teaching>

## Description

This course is an introduction to some philosophical questions about language and some of the formal tools useful for making progress on them.

We will focus on two big topics:

1. How can words and sentences have the meanings they have?
2. Can our languages be improved upon or be replaced by better languages?

The course will be primarily discussion-based rather than lecture-based. Most of our meetings will be devoted to small group conversations. The assignments are designed to ensure that everyone is well prepared for these conversations and to encourage further reflection on them afterwards.

The aim is to help you think through the questions of the course together and to develop the important skill of having focused discussions that are both critical and collaborative.

## Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

## Books

No book purchases necessary. All readings will be made available online.

## Office Hours

I will be in the class Zoom room on Fridays from 10:30 AM-12:00 PM EST each week for discussions with whoever wants to drop by. I enjoy talking with people about philosophy, so please feel welcome to come to these, even if you don't have any specific thing you feel you need to ask me about. You don't need to schedule a meeting to come to these.

If you need to meet with me one-on-one, you can either email me to find some time that works for us both or you can schedule an appointment online for some time on Fridays between 1:00–2:30 PM EST here: <http://mikedeigan.com/meet>

One-on-one meetings will need to be scheduled at least a day in advance.

## Assignments

1. *Readings & Perusall Discussion:* there will be readings assigned for each week. You will be required to read these carefully and discuss them on Perusall, an online social annotation platform accessed through Canvas.

2. *Pre-meeting Write-ups*: prior to each meeting, you will write a question you would like answered and a point you would like to make in the meeting. These will be shared with your group to help make a meeting agenda.
3. *Weekly Reports*: at the end of each week you will complete a brief report answering some comprehension questions and writing about some of what you took away from the week's discussions.
4. *Argument Stress Tests*: over the course of the semester you will write three 1,000 word papers putting pressure on the weakest point in a philosophical argument and determining how best to strengthen the argument.

## **Grading**

Perusall comments and Pre-meeting Write-ups will be given pass/fail/0 grades based on completion with reasonable effort. I will give you a warning before failing an assignment for being completed without reasonable effort.

Weekly Reports and Argument Stress Tests will be given number grades based on comprehension, thoughtfulness, cogency, and creativity.

Your lowest grade weekly Perusall grade, lowest Weekly Report, and two lowest Pre-meeting write-up grades will be dropped.

Rubrics for each assignment type will be distributed in advance.

The final grade number will be determined with the following weights:

Perusall discussion:	15%
Pre-meeting write-ups:	15%
Weekly reports:	30%
Paper #1:	10%
Paper #2:	15%
Paper #3:	15%

The final grade number to letter conversion will be as follows:

A	92.5 – 100.0
B+	86.5 – 92.49
B	82.5 – 86.49
C+	76.5 – 82.49
C	72.5 – 76.49
D	59.5 – 72.49
F	00.0 – 59.49

## **Policies**

### *Late Policy:*

For argument stress tests and weekly write-ups, I'll take off two points for each day after the deadline it is turned in. No late credit for Perusall comments or Pre-meeting Write-ups, except in special circumstances.

For all deadlines, I'm willing to be reasonably flexible. If you need an extra couple days because of other commitments or illness, just let me know a few days in advance and I don't mind giving an extension, even for non-emergency situations.

Longer extensions or last minute extensions require special circumstances.

### **Schedule**

The assigned readings are subject to change. I will notify you of any such changes at least one week in advance and post an updated syllabus on the course webpage.

#### *Source of Meaning: Nature, Intentions, Conventions*

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|--------|------|--|
| Week 1 | 1/19 | Carroll (1871) "Humpty Dumpty" (selection)   |
| Week 2 | 1/24 | Confucius <i>Analects</i> 13.3<br>Plato <i>Cratylus</i> (selections)   |
|        | 1/26 | Plato <i>Cratylus</i> (selection)<br>Aristotle <i>De Interpretatione</i> (selection)<br>Xunzi "Correct Naming" (selection)                                   |
| Week 3 | 1/31 | Russell (1921) <i>Analysis of Mind</i> (selection)<br>Rousseau (1755) <i>Second Discourse</i> (selection)<br>Darwin (1871) <i>Descent of Man</i> (selection) |
|        | 2/02 | Grice (1957) "Meaning"   |
| Week 4 | 2/07 | Grice (1974) "Meaning Revisited" (selection)<br>Wittgenstein (1953) <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (selection)  |
|        | 2/09 | Lewis (1963) <i>Convention</i> (selection)   |
| Week 5 | 2/14 | Skyrms (2010) <i>Signals</i> (selection)<br>Deigan (2022) " <a href="#">Some Skyrmsian Signalling Simulations</a> "  |
|        | 2/16 | No reading (Argument Stress Test writing)  |

#### *Rules and Meaning*

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|--------|------|---|
| Week 6 | 2/21 | Your groupmates' Argument Stress Test drafts  |
|        | 2/23 | Borges (1941) "The Library of Babel"<br>Chomsky (1964) <i>Current Issues in Linguistic Theory</i> (selection) |
| Week 7 | 2/28 | Course notes: generative grammars   |
|        | 3/02 | Course notes: sets and coordinators   |

		Frege (1923) “Compound Thoughts” (selection)
Week 8	3/07	Course notes: sets, names, descriptions, and adjectives
	3/09	Course notes: functions and possessives
Spring break!		
Week 9	3/21	Kripke (1982) <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> (selection)
	3/23	Kripke (1982) <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> (selection)
		Millikan (1990) “Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox” (selection)
Week 10	3/28	Millikan (1990) “Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox” (selection)
	3/30	No reading (Argument Stress Test writing)
Week 11	4/04	Your groupmates’ drafts

### *Improving Meanings*

	4/06	Leibniz (1678) Preface to a Universal Characteristic (selection) Frege (1879) <i>Begriffschrift</i> preface (selection) Carnap (1963) “Intellectual Biography” (selection)
Week 12	4/11	Russell (1923) “Vagueness” Borges (1946) “On Exactitude in Science” Carroll (1983) <i>Sylvie and Bruno Concluded</i> (selection) 4/13 Carnap (1928) <i>Pseudoproblems in Philosophy</i> (selection) ‘
Week 13	4/18	Russell (1918) <i>The Philosophy of Logical Atomism</i> (selection)
	4/20	Orwell (1946) “Politics and the English Language” Ball (2021) “An Invitation to Social and Political Metasemantics” (selections)
Week 14	4/25	Langton, Haslanger, and Anderson (2017) “Language and Race” (selction) Saul (2019) “Are generics especially pernicious?” (selection)
	4/27	Dembroff and Wodak (2021) “How Much Gender is Too Much Gender?”
Week 15	5/02	Where to go next?

**5/10 Argument Stress Test #3 due**