

# Semantics & Pragmatics for Philosophy

Seminar for graduates and  
advanced undergraduates

Michael Deigan

michael.deigan@yale.edu

<https://mikedeigan.com/teaching/>

## Description

There's a lot of recent work in philosophy of language that is important for other areas of philosophy. But much of it is based on and developed in terms of ideas from formal semantics and pragmatics that are inaccessible to many philosophers. This course aims to bring you up to speed on many of these ideas and survey some of their interesting applications.

In the first part of the course we will cover some core ideas that can serve as a foundation and that have broad application. In the second part we will work through some extensions of these foundations and applications to issues in social and political philosophy, philosophy of gender and race, metaethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and metaphilosophy.

## Prerequisites

First-order logic, plus at least two other courses in philosophy or permission of the instructor.

## Assignments

1. *Class participation*: class and section meetings won't be primarily lecture-based. Instead, you'll spend much of class time talking and working through problems. Active participation, not just attendance, is required.
2. *Problem Sets*: you will complete three problem sets in the first part of the course. With my permission, students who already have the requisite background in semantics may replace the problem sets by writing a longer paper or an additional short paper.
4. *Paper*: undergraduates will write a 2,500–3,000 word paper, graduate students will write a 4,000–6,000 word paper. You may write on the topic of your choosing, but must discuss it with me first.

## Grading

Participation: 25%  
Problem Sets: 25%  
Paper: 50%

## Schedule

The assigned readings are subject to change. I will notify you of any such changes at least one week in advance.

### Introduction

- Week 1 Russell: intro to *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Language*  
Coppock and Champollion: *Invitation to Formal Semantics (IFS)*,  
read Ch. 1, skim 2 and 3 for notation and refreshing your memory

### Part I. Foundations

#### Compositional Semantics for Declaratives

- Week 2 Lambdas and Types, *IFS*, Ch. 4  
Week 3 Basic Compositional Semantics, *IFS*, Chs. 5 & 6

#### *Problem Set 1 due*

- Week 4 Tense and aspect, *IFS*, Ch. 12  
Week 5 Modality and Conditionals, *IFS*, Ch. 13;  
Heim and von Stechow: *Intensional Semantics* 3.2, 4, 5

#### *Problem Set 2 due*

#### Modelling Discourse and Non-declaratives

- Week 6 Hagstrom: "Questions"  
Week 7 Stalnaker: selection from "Assertion";  
Lewis: "Scorekeeping in a Language Game";  
Roberts: selection from "Information Structure in Discourse";  
Portner: selection from "The Semantics of Imperatives within a Theory of Clause Types"

#### *Problem Set 3 due*

- Week 8 Catch-up, Review, and Preview

### Part II. Extensions and Applications

#### Social and Political Philosophy: Not-at-issue Content and Attention

- Week 9 Langton: "Blocking as Counter-speech";  
Stanley: *How Propaganda Works*, Ch. 4;  
Deigan: "Stupefying"

### **Philosophy of Gender & Race: Generics**

- Week 10 Haslanger: "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground";  
Nickel "Generics";  
Ritchie "Should We Use Racial and Gender Generics?"

### **Metaethics: 'ought' and 'good'**

- Week 11 Szabó: "Adjectives in Context" §§3–4;  
Finlay: *Confusion of Tongues*, Ch. 2;  
Chrisman: "On the Meaning of 'Ought'";  
Lassiter: "Linguistic and Philosophical Considerations on Bayesian Semantics" **(optional)**

### **Epistemology and Logic: Epistemic Modals and Probabilistic Contents**

- Week 12 Moss: *Probabilistic Knowledge*, Chs. 2–4, Appendix;  
Stojnić: "One's *Modus Ponens*: Modality, Coherence and Logic";  
Mandelkern: "Bounded Modality" **(optional)**

*Discuss paper topics with me*

### **Metaphysics: 'same', 'different', Counting, and Co-predication**

- Week 13 Lasersohn "Same, Models and Representation";  
Barker: "Individuation and Quantification";  
Moss: "Four-dimensionalist Theories of Persistence";  
Liebesmann and Magidor: "Copredication and Property Inheritance";  
Shan: "Splitting Hairs" **(optional)**

### **Metaphilosophy: Metalinguistic Negotiation**

- Week 14 Barker: "Negotiating Taste";  
Thomasson: "Metaphysical Disputes and Metalinguistic Negotiation";  
Plunkett and Sundell: "Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms"

- Finals Optional mini-conference

*Papers due*