

## Pragmatics (01:615:350)

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**Time:** Mondays & Thursdays 12:10–13:30

**Platform:** Hardenbergh Hall – A2

**Course website:** [canvas.rutgers.edu](https://canvas.rutgers.edu)

**Instructor:** Prof. Yimei Xiang ([yimei.xiang@rutgers.edu](mailto:yimei.xiang@rutgers.edu))

**Office:** 18 Seminary Place, Room 205

**Office hour:** Wednesdays 10:00–11:00 (online)

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### About this course

In our daily usage of languages, what a sentence conveys can be much richer than its literal meaning. For example, from the sentence *Ede had too much coffee and couldn't fall asleep last night*, we can draw not only a conjunction of two propositions (the literal meaning), but also a causality relation between these two propositions (the non-literal meaning) — having too much coffee made Ede unable to fall asleep last night. The non-literal aspect of meaning can either make communication more efficient, or cause bumps or potholes.

This course is about Pragmatics, the subfield of Linguistics devoted to understanding the non-literal aspect of meaning, such as how the utterance context and conversational maxims affect the meaning of an utterance, and what an utterance attributes to the context. In this course, we will focus on the relationship between semantics and pragmatics and will explore a range of theoretical and experimental studies in pragmatics.

### Course learning goals and objectives

By the end of the semester, you should be able to

- explain, compare, and contrast a range of topics covered under pragmatics
- identify the distinction between semantics and pragmatics and what is meant by each
- gain technical mastery over the tools of linguistic analysis in pragmatics
- analyze and evaluate language usage in context (your own language and that of others)
- attribute the main claims of notable researchers who have made contributions in this area
- gain familiarity with psycholinguistic and developmental experimentation in pragmatics
- understand how testable experimental hypotheses arise from theoretical claims, what methodologies are used, and how experimental results inform linguistic (pragmatic and semantic) theory

For majors and minors: To add to your technical and conceptual repertoire in the field of Linguistics as you complete a (core) course as part of your major or minor.

### Course website & Office hours & Contacts

- This course has a website on Canvas ([canvas.rutgers.edu](https://canvas.rutgers.edu)). Log on using your NETID and password, and then look for the course in your Dashboard or Courses. If you encounter difficulty using Canvas, please contact the OIT help desk: [it.rutgers.edu/help-support/](https://it.rutgers.edu/help-support/)
- Office hours are on Wednesdays 10:00–11:00 am and by arrangement. All office hours take place on Zoom (Appointments are necessary. No drop-ins!) In most cases, each person may reserve a 15-mins slot per week. To make an appointment, please send an email to Prof. Xiang ([yimei.xiang@rutgers.edu](mailto:yimei.xiang@rutgers.edu)) to request a meeting link. Extra appointments must be scheduled at least 5 days in advance.
- You must be well-prepared for your visit to the office hours; for example, you should identify in advance the specific questions you want to discuss. In addition to the course materials, you are also more than welcome to discuss other materials on Pragmatics with me. This is also a good time for us to get to know each other, and for me to learn more about your style of communication or your career plans (which might help if you ask me for a reference letter later on).

- Office hours can NOT be used for re-teaching the materials. If you need to make up a class, you must go over the slides and notes by yourself first before visiting the office hours. Please also note that your instructors cannot help with solutions of homeworks that are not yet graded.
- Prof. Xiang will be on leave starting from Week 12 (subject to further notification). During the last few weeks, please contact Prof. Kristen Syrett ([kristen.syrett@rutgers.edu](mailto:kristen.syrett@rutgers.edu)) for course-related inquiries.

## Course requirements

Your final grade is based on discussion postings, midterm and final exams, and participation. The percentage-wise breakdown is on the left, and the corresponding letter grades are on the right.

Grading breakdown		Letter grades	
Participation	10%	A	$\geq 90\%$
8 discussion postings	50%	B+	85–89.9%
Midterm exam	20%	B	80–84.9%
Final exam	20%	C+	75–79.9%
		C	70–74.9%
		D	60–69.9%
		F	$\leq 59.9\%$

### • Participation (10%)

- *Attendance*: When you attend a class, you are expected to participate in discussions, ask questions, and be involved in the in-class activities. If you miss a class, you are responsible for reading the relevant course materials before the next class in a timely manner.
- *Classroom etiquette*: Face coverings are required all the time inside the classroom. Compliance is mandatory.
- *Absences*: University policy excuses absences due to religious observance or participation in Rutgers-approved activities, and permits students to make up work missed for these circumstances. You must notify me in advance if this applies to you.

If you anticipate that you will be absent for whatever reason, particularly religious or medical reasons or for an emergency, you must notify Prof. Xiang in writing as soon as possible AND report your absence via this link: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>

Students who must (for whatever reason) miss more than an occasional class should consult with the Dean of Students office. Note that it will be extremely difficult to perform successfully in this class, should you miss multiple classes.

### • Discussion Postings (50%)

- Post a comment and/or contribute to a discussion thread related to the assigned reading and lecture content. Students enrolled in this class will be divided into four groups. For each discussion topic, students in one group will be responsible of opening new discussion threads by **Saturday** 10:00 pm (early submission is encouraged!), and the others will chose a thread and submit a comment by **Sunday** 10:00 pm. There are 8 discussion topics in total.
- These contributions must be substantive, and must be at least a paragraph in length and include some sort of reaction on your part to the reading or in-class content or discussion. You will not get credit for a post that does not have these characteristics!

### • Midterm (20%) and Final (20%)

There will be an open-book midterm on **October 27** (Thursday) and a take-home final due on the the day designated by the University. Collaboration is not allowed.

### • Experiment participation (extra credits)

You have the opportunity to raise your final grade by **up to two points** through experimental participation. More information to be added once made available.

## Course Schedule

This plan is subject to change. See the course website for the most up-to-date version. Lectures from Week 13 to 15 will be led by Prof. Kristen Syrett ([kristen.syrett@rutgers.edu](mailto:kristen.syrett@rutgers.edu)) and Prof. Peter Alrenga ([peter.alrenga@rutgers.edu](mailto:peter.alrenga@rutgers.edu)).

Week	Date	Topic	Requirements
Unit 1: Introduction			
1	Sep 8	Course Overview	Questionnaire
2	Sep 12	What is Pragmatics?	
	Sep 15	Inferential Relations	
Unit 2: Implicatures and Presuppositions			
3	Sep 19, 22	Conversational Implicatures	Forum Posting 1
4	Sep 26, 29	Scalar Implicatures	Forum Posting 2
5	Oct 3, 6	Basics of Presuppositions	Forum Posting 3
6	Oct 10, 13	Accommodation, Defeasibility, Projection	Forum Posting 4
7	Oct 17, 20	The Projection Problem & Comparing Inferences	Forum Posting 5
8	Oct 24	Review	
	Oct 27	Midterm	
9	Oct 31, Nov 3	Advanced Topics on Inferences	Forum Posting 6
Unit 3: Information Structure, References, Speech Acts			
10	Nov 7, 10	Focus	Forum Posting 7
11	Nov 14, 17	Deixis and Indexicals	Forum Posting 8
12	Nov 21, 22	Speech Acts and Performatives (Asynchronous Materials)	
Unit 4: Pragmatics in Labs and the Real World			
13	Nov 28	Experiments: Context-dependence (by Prof. Syrett)	
	Dec 1	Speech Acts and the Law (by Prof. Alrenga)	
14	Dec 5	Experiments: Conversational Implicatures (by Prof. Syrett)	
	Dec 8	Conversational Implicature in the Courtroom (by Prof. Alrenga)	
15	Dec 12	Experiments: Acquisition of Scalar Implicatures (by Prof. Syrett)	
	Dec 22	Take-home Final Exam	

## Weekly schedule

Monday	Class meeting: 12:10–1:30pm New discussion opens up.
Wednesday	Complete readings for Thursday. Office hours: 10:00–11:00am
Thursday	Class meeting: 12:10–1:30pm
Saturday	Organize your notes and questions. Open new discussion threads by 10pm.
Sunday	Complete any readings for Monday. Contribute to discussion threads by 10pm

## Readings

There is no assigned textbook. All readings are pdfs found in the dedicated Canvas module. In some cases, you are only asked to read certain sections of the assigned reading. Most readings are taken from the following books:

Levinson, Stephen. (1983) *Pragmatics*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Chierchia, Gennaro and Sally McConnell-Ginet. (2000) *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics*. (2nd edition) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cummins, Chris. (2019) *Pragmatics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

## General policies

The following policies are provided at [ling.rutgers.edu](http://ling.rutgers.edu) > Academics > Undergraduate > Learning Goals and Policies (a direct link is [here](#)). It is the responsibility of all students to read and abide by the policies.

- Rutgers Code of Student Conduct

- Policy on Religiously Observant Students

- Students with Disabilities

- Attendance Policy

- Academic Integrity (See [here](#) for updates in June 2020)

- Concerns

- Sakai Policy

- Email and Contact Information Policy

## Disability Services

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <http://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: [ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form](http://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form).

## Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners. Call (848) 932-7884 or visit [rhscaps.rutgers.edu](http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu).