

COM 319: LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND READINGS

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will:

1. **be able to express their thoughtful, critical reactions to readings orally and in writing** (at a level appropriate to an upper division university education)
2. **demonstrate increased knowledge and understanding** of principles and applications of rhetorical studies, general semantics, persuasion, argumentation and cognate research, and the utility of those principles in assessing public discourse;
3. complete tasks in line with these **University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs)**
 - A. Intellectual Breadth and Lifelong Learning
 - [1] demonstrate in-depth knowledge and skills in at least one major area;
 - [4] transfer knowledge and skills gained from general and specialized studies to new settings and complex problems;
 - B. Inquiry and Critical Thinking
 - [1] identify problems, articulate questions or hypotheses, and determine the need for information;
 - [2] access and collect the needed information from appropriate primary and secondary sources;
 - [3] use qualitative methods, including the ability to recognize assumptions, draw inferences, make deductions, and interpret information to analyze problems in context and draw conclusions;
 - [4] recognize complexity of problems and identify different perspectives from which problems and questions can be viewed;
 - [6] identify, analyze, and evaluate reasoning and construct and defend reasonable arguments and explanations.
 - C. Communication
 - [1] demonstrate general academic literacy including how to respond to the needs of audiences and to different kinds of situations, analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence, and construct sound arguments using Standard Written English;
 - [2] effectively use the common genres and conventions for writing within a

particular discipline or profession;

[4] collaborate effectively with others to share information, solve problems, and complete tasks.

TEXTS

Lee, Irving J. *Language Habits in Human Affairs*. Second Edition. Englewood, NJ: Institute of General Semantics, 1994. Note: Readings from this text inform lectures throughout the term. Seven copies of the text are on reserve in the library. Assigned readings are required. ISBN: 0-918970-41-5

Lutz, William. *Doublespeak: From Revenue Enhancement to Terminal Living*. New York: Ig Publishing, 2015 (orig. published 1989). ISBN: 978-1-63246-017-2

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves To Death*. Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Introduction by Andrew Postman. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. ISBN: 978-0-14-303-653-1

CHAPTER

Todd, Candace. "Internet Politics and Cybercitizens," in Dan F. Hahn, *Political Communication: Rhetoric, Government, and Citizens*. Distributed as a pdf

Additional articles and/or chapters may be distributed as pdf attachments during the term.

ELECTRONIC LECTURES

Talking Sense. Video series by Professor Irving Lee includes six lectures:

1. "Just what is General Semantics?"
2. "Do You Know How to Make a Statement of Fact?"
3. "Why Do People Misunderstand Each Other?"
4. "What is a Good Observer?"
5. "On the Difference between Words and Things."
6. "The Man Who Knows It All."

REQUIREMENTS

1. Once each class session begins, electronic devices must be turned off. This includes laptop computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), cell phones, etc. I concur with David Cole, Professor of Law in the Georgetown University Law Center, who argues that, absent such devices, students [A] are more apt to focus on course content during class, and [B] benefit from learning to take notes rather than to type lectures verbatim on electronic devices. See: "Laptops vs. Learning," *Washington Post*, 7 April 2007, A13.
2. Because of a strong correlation between students' presence and participation in class and their performance on examinations, attendance is required.

Students are expected to arrive on time and to remain in class until the end of the session. Sessions last only seventy-five minutes, so there is no need to disrupt class by habitual departures and returns. Such habits, as well as consistently late arrivals or departures, will be treated as absences in calculating course grades.

3. Consistent with university policy, reasonable accommodation will be made for holy days and religious observance. In the case of such occasions, students should contact the instructor ***the first week of the term*** so that appropriate accommodation, if necessary, can be made.
4. Also in accord with university policy, students involved in official university business and events will be excused on days that those events take place. However, the instructor must be notified ***in writing at least one week in advance*** of any absences required for university business.
5. Four short answer examinations, graded equally on composition and content, will be administered on September 29, October 27, December 1, and December 15.

A. The first three examinations are discrete or independent of one another, the final examination is cumulative.

B. Each student's three highest exam scores are weighted equally in calculating course grades.

CALCULATING COURSE GRADES

1. Students' three highest exam scores are weighted 30% each in determining course grades.
2. Attendance and participation account for the remaining 10%. Grading scale for attendance is 0-1 absences = A, 2 absences = A-, 3 absences = B+, four absences = B, five absences = B-, six absences = C+, etc.
3. Standard **numerical values** are assigned to each letter grade earned: A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1.
4. If a **plus or minus** attaches to any letter grade, the numerical value increases or decreases by .3. An A- is thus worth 3.7, a C+ is 2.3, and so on. There is no A+ or 4.3.
5. After determining the point value on each assignment, students can calculate course grades in four steps: [1] multiply the grade point earned on the three highest exam scores by three; [2] add the attendance grade, based on the formula in item 2 above, to the multiplied exam grades; [3] divide the total by 10, and [4] locate the average in relation to the corresponding letter grade on the scale below. For example:

(Exam #1	D+)	
Exam #2:	C	2.0 X 3 =		6.0
Exam #3:	B-	2.7 X 3 =		8.1
Final Exam	C+	2.3 X 3 =		6.9
<u>Attendance (2 absences): A-</u>				<u>3.7</u>
TOTAL				24.7

These scores yield a total of 24.7 grade points, which divided by 10 equals a 2.47 average, between a C+ and a B- based on the Scale below. *When students' numerical scores place them between two clear cut grades, the question becomes:* Did the student do all s/he could to help determine her/his own grade? If the student in the example took all four exams, s/he is deemed to have done everything possible to help himself/herself and will have earned the higher of the two grades. Teachers do not give grades, students earn grades.

<u>Scale:</u>	3.85-4.00	A
	3.65-3.84	A-

3.25-3.44	B+
2.85-3.24	B
2.65-2.84	B-
2.25-2.44	C+
1.85-2.24	C
1.65-1.84	C-
1.25-1.44	D+
.85-1.24	D
.65-.84	D-

POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to read and abide by the guidelines on the Student Academic Misconduct Policy posted at the UNLV web site (<https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct>). Students who submit work not of their own creation, who attempt to cheat on examinations, or who commit other transgressions described in the policies will receive an automatic “F” in the class, will be referred to the university’s Student Judicial Affairs officer, and are subject to university suspension.

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DISABILITY ACCOMODATION POLICY

The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, <http://drc.unlv.edu/>, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to the instructor during office hours so that you may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach the instructor in front of others to discuss your accommodation needs.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS AND UNIVERSITY REPRESENTATION

Students who observe religious holidays and/or participate in university-authorized activities may be excused from class, per university policy. Absences for religious occasions require written notification to the instructor no later than one week into the semester. Absences for university activities—e.g. moot court competitions, presentation of research projects, athletics, debate, etc.—require written notification to the instructor at least one week in advance of the absence.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

Students may consult with a librarian on research needs. For this class, the subject librarian is Susie Skarl. UNLV Libraries provides resources to support students’ access to information.

Discovery, access, and use of information are vital skills for academic work and for successful post-college life. Access library resources and ask questions at <https://www.library.unlv.edu/>.

TUTORING AND COACHING

The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring, academic success coaching and other academic assistance for all UNLV undergraduate students. For information regarding tutoring subjects, tutoring times, and other ASC programs and services, visit <http://www.unlv.edu/asc> or call [702-895-3177](tel:702-895-3177). The ASC building is located across from the Student Services Complex (SSC). Academic success coaching is located on the second floor of the SSC (ASC Coaching Spot). Drop-in tutoring is located on the second floor of the Lied Library and College of Engineering TEB second floor.

UNLV Writing Center

One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-3-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 702-895-3908. The student's Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible), and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. More information can be found at: <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>.

TRANSPARENCY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The University encourages application of the transparency method of constructing assignments for student success. Please see these two links for further information: <https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning> and <https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency>

REBELMAIL

By policy, faculty and staff should e-mail students' Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV's official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication such as information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. Students' e-mail prefixes are listed on class rosters. The suffix is always @unlv.nevada.edu. Emailing within WebCampus is acceptable.

EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

1. Examination **options are based** equally on lectures and assigned readings. Roughly 1/3 of the items are from lecture and cannot be located in readings, material for another 1/3 of the questions is taken from readings alone, and the balance of the questions merge reading and lecture material.
2. **Grades** are assigned on a 90-, 80-, 70-, 60-, etc. distribution. Curves are not employed. Results are examined carefully, however, to discern any problems in the test itself that might require adjustment. Every effort is made to ensure the fair and equitable assessment of student performance.
3. Short-answer **exams typically contain** 10 items, and each item is worth six points.
 - A In a majority of instances there will be choice within an item. In such instances, students are to write either on item A or on item B. *There is no extra credit for writing on both, and time is wasted in doing so.*
 - B. **Literacy counts.** Express all answers in complete sentences and paragraphs. Even items that ask the student to “list” or “enumerate” require complete sentence responses.
4. **Instructions:** Provide appropriate list, definition, or explanatory options on each of the following items. Do everything the item requires, but do only what the item requires. Because assessment is based on expression as well as content, **all responses must be cast as complete, literate sentences and paragraphs.**
5. **Sample questions** and strong responses:
 - A. Question: As discussed in lecture, Sopory and Dillard report five key findings based on recent research on metaphor. List any three of these and illustrate one of the three with a specific and thorough example.

Answer: Three of the findings reported by Sopory and Dillard are that [1] the use of metaphor enhances a communicator’s credibility, [2] publics are more likely to adopt a new guiding metaphor only if one in which they already believe is dislodged, and [3] communicators should use a single metaphor and sustain it throughout the message. The danger in attempting to use too many metaphors is the potential for mixed metaphors, which confuse rather than clarify. The illustration in class was “the alligators are in the swamp and it’s time to circle the wagons.” One or the other of these should offer both the problem and the solution, but mixing only confuses.
 - B. Question: Two topics Lee addresses in chapter two, “The Useful Use of Words,” are “Note the Two Media” and “Fitting the Two.” Identify the two media to which he refers, summarize both, and explain what he means by “fitting the two.”

Answer: Lee writes of the two media that we live in a “world of words” and in a

“world of not-words.” His point is that we use language to discuss phenomena, but the words are not the phenomena. Put another way, the universe of discourse is not the universe of direct experience. By “fitting the two,” Lee means that verbal representations of phenomena must not be “false to fact.” A map constructed to move east from Chicago to San Francisco to New York, for example, misrepresents the territory wherein we move east from San Francisco to Chicago to New York.

6. **Evaluation Standards** employed in assessing short answer responses include:

6-This is an *excellent* response. The content is complete and thorough. Expression is clean and characterized by qualities of language discussed in class as elements of good style. Answers with **abbreviations** and **short hand symbols** in place of words are **ineligible for this rating**.

5-This is a *very good/good* answer. Most of the content is covered, but there is insufficient detail to warrant a 6. Or the content may be thorough, but the writing is flawed in terms of mechanics or style.

4-This is *good/average* response. The writer may have the “right idea,” but when an identification of three items is required, only two are identified correctly. Or, someone may have all the content, but submits a fragmented, awkward, or incompletely expressed response. See instructions: All answers must be expressed as complete sentences.

3-This is an *average/fair* answer, which shows something of what is called for but is incomplete in content and/or seriously problematic in expression. One example would be an answer that does half of what is called for, but is expressed clearly. Or there might be a good though incomplete start on content, yet the answer is in fragments and/or abbreviations and/or symbols.

2-This *fair/poor* response provides something to indicate that the author has an idea of what’s expected and understands how the task is to be executed. But s/he simply may not be responding to the question asked. This rating is used, for instance, when a “good” or “average” answer is provided to a question based on reading or lecture, but it is an answer to a question other than the one that is asked. Responses that are seriously problematic in both content and expression also may be rated at this level.

1-Writers receive something if they try and if the *response is in the area of remote plausibility*.

EXAMINATION READING SCHEDULE

Examination #1, September 29, will include:

Lee, Chapter 2
Lutz, Chapters I, VI, and VII
Postman, Chapters 1-2

Examination #2, October 27 , will include:

Lee, Chapters 3 and 9
Postman, Chapters 3, 4 and 9
Todd, "Internet Politics and Cybercitizens" (pdf)

Examination #3, December 1, will include:

Lee, Chapters 6-7
Lutz, Chapter VIII
Postman, Chapter 7-8

Final Examination, December 15, will include:

All previous readings in the semester
Lutz, Chapters II and IV
See the schedule at: <http://www.unlv.edu/registrar/calendars>.

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

- I Orientation to Language
 - A Elements of Style
 - B Recent Research on Metaphor
 - C Connation and Denotation

- II What is General Semantics?
 - A Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity* (1933)
 - B Working Definition of General Semantics
 - C Lee's Interest
 - D Lee's Model of Effective Communication

- III The Language of War

- A Doublespeak
 - B Naming “the Enemy” in Vietnam
 - C Broadcasting the Persian Gulf War
- IV On Making Statements of Fact
- A Declarative Statements
 - B Statements of Fact
 - C Inference Making
- V Language and Epistemology
- A Levels of Cognition
 - B Applications of the Levels
- VI Language, Thought, and Media Culture
- A Evolution of Communication Media
 - B Impact on Thought and Deliberation
- VII On Misunderstanding
- A Technical vs. Nontechnical Vocabulary
 - B Traits of Words
 - C Words are Not “Fixed”
 - D Communication is a Two-Way Process
- VIII Theories of Source Credibility
- A Classical Ethos
 - B Credibility in a Media Age
 - C Credibility vs. Celebrity
- IX Image Construction in a Media Culture
- A Concept of Image
 - B Restoring Credibility in Nuclear Power Campaigns
- X What is a Good Observer?
- A. Similarity vs. Difference
 - B. Value of Similarity

- C. Value of Difference
- D. The Good Observer

XI On the Differences between Words and Things

XII Ethics and Public Discourse