

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION PROCESSES

Graduate Seminar #80491-001, SPRING 2007, Tuesdays 11:00-1:30

Location: Kent Hall #244 when no one else is in there; otherwise, Kent Hall #076

OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays 1:00-3:00, Thursdays 10:30-12:30, or by appointment. I'm in #230 Kent Hall, (330) 672-3789, krawson1@kent.edu.

COURSE READINGS: For most of the readings, electronic copies are available through the library system. For those not available electronically, you can borrow the hard copy of the article from me to make your own copy (or of course, you can copy the original available on the shelves in the library).

COURSE GOALS: What I hope you will take away from this seminar is twofold: Your first goal should be to amass a good working knowledge of the literature on language comprehension processes—you may not remember every little detail, but you should at least try to come away with a good understanding of what higher-level cognitive processes are involved in language comprehension and what some of the basic theories within the area state. Your second goal should be to apply this knowledge to other cognitive domains—your own area of research, at a minimum. To this end, you will wrap up the semester by writing a paper that integrates what you've learned in this class with your own research interests.

ASSIGNMENTS: Too often, a student's ultimate goal becomes getting a grade, rather than expanding one's knowledge and thinking skills. If you have any residual "grade blinders" left over from your undergraduate days, shed them now. As a graduate student, your goal for this class (or any class) should be to continue your development as a scientist—to think critically about theoretical claims, methods, data, and their relationship to one another, and to further expand your knowledge about cognitive phenomena and research.

Note that the "work" that I am "assigning" you is first and foremost designed to support your learning and critical evaluation of the theories and research in this area, and only secondarily as stuff that can be graded. Your grade will be based on three factors: weekly responses, class participation, and a final paper.

- Weekly responses: For each week, I will only be assigning two papers, so we will have time to think carefully through each one and having meaningful discussions about both. To support this, for class each week, I would like you to write a short response for each paper. You should bring your weekly response to class with you to turn in at the end of each class.
  - Each response should begin with a brief summary of what you think are the most important theoretical claims and/or empirical findings in the paper—note the emphasis on brief (anyone can write a long summary; distilling down to the most important ideas is the better intellectual exercise). In other words, imagine that you were trying to give a colleague who hadn't read the paper the upshot of what the paper was about and the main take-home message.
  - Then, each response should close with at least two questions that the article raised for you. They should be the kind of question that would provide good fodder for discussion in the class. For example, "I wonder why they only ran 20 participants instead of 30" is NOT a good question. Instead, your questions should be hitting at a higher conceptual level, such as questioning theoretical assumptions, comparing one theory with another or one set of findings with other research discussed earlier, issues of generalization, etc. Good meaty stuff like that.
- Class participation: For each paper for each class, one student will be selected as the "lead" for that article. Your role will be to first provide a brief summary of the paper and then to lead discussion of the paper. (Having already written a good summary and thoughtful questions for weekly responses should make this a no-brainer.) Everyone's name will be placed in a box, and whoever is selected will present for that paper. Each of you will have one "free pass." You can use this pass either (1) because you just don't feel like presenting on a day you are chosen or (2) because you need to miss a class for whatever reason. Note, however, that even if you're not selected as the lead for a particular article, I'll expect everyone to be talking during every class.
- Final paper: What I'd like you to do is to write a project proposal. The proposal will include two components. First, you'll set the stage for your proposed project by briefly reviewing the most relevant literature discussed in class along with at least a couple outside papers (I can help you find these). As in any good journal article, you'll want to explain the current theoretical and empirical state of the field regarding your issue of interest and how your proposed project will significantly contribute to the field.

Note that this component of your paper should be concise and linear (we'll talk more about this in class). Second, you'll then describe in some detail the method for your proposed study. You have some degrees of freedom here, and about mid-semester (if not sooner) we'll start talking about specific ideas you'd like to pursue in your paper. Ideally, I think you could shoot to devise a study that connects one or more key issues from class with work you're doing in your own research, and potentially a study that you would actually run.

**COURSE POLICIES:** I expect that all students know and will adhere to the university's honor code, and your continued enrollment in this class is taken as your agreement with this policy. The minimum penalty for failing to adhere to this honor code is an F in the course. If you are not familiar with the university's policy, you should visit <http://imagine.kent.edu/policyreg> and search on Policy # 3342-3-07. University policy 3342-3-18 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Disability Services (contact 330-672-3391) or visit [www.kent.edu/sds](http://www.kent.edu/sds) for more information on registration procedures.

**COURSE SCHEDULE:** Note that this schedule is tentative and may be revised depending upon how quickly or slowly we move through these articles.

January	16	Introduction and course overview
January	23	The role of schemata in comprehension: Bower, Black, & Turner (1979) Kintsch & van Dijk (1978)
January	30	Questioning the role of schemata in comprehension: Alba & Hasher (1983) McKoon, Ratcliff, & Seifert (1989)
February	6	Construction-integration theory: Kintsch (1988)
February	13	Extensions of construction-integration theory: Sanjose & Vidal-Abarca (2006) Goldman, Varma, & Coté (1996)
February	20	Minimalist theory of inferencing McKoon & Ratcliff (1992) Kintsch (1993)
February	27	Constructionist theory of inferencing Singer, Graesser, & Trabasso (1994) Graesser, Singer, & Trabasso (1994)
March	6	Empirical evidence for or against these theories? Noordman, Vonk, & Kempff (1992) Peracchi & O'Brien (2004)
March	13	Memory-based processes in comprehension Myers & O'Brien (1998) Zwaan, Stanfield, & Yaxley (2002)
March	21-23	individual meetings to discuss project proposals

March	27	SPRING BREAK
April	3	Referential inferences McKoon, Gerrig, & Greene (1996) Cook, Myers, & O'Brien (2005)
April	10	Causal inferences Suh & Trabasso (1993) van den Broek (1990)
April	17	Situation models Zwaan & Radvansky (1998) Therriault, Rinck, & Zwaan (2006)
April	24	Cognitive resources in comprehension Caplan & Waters (1999) – read pp. 77-94 (pp. 95-126 are optional) Rawson (2007)
May	1	Topic TBA

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