METHODS IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY SYLLABUS

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
Faculty of Science

PSYO 3091.03 Fall 2026

Dalhousie University operates in the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples. These sovereign nations hold inherent rights as the original peoples of these lands, and we each carry collective obligations under the Peace and Friendship Treaties. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada.
We recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies, and contributions have enriched the part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

Course Professor	Email	Drop-In Student Office Hours
Dr. Sophie Jacques	sophie.jacques@dal.ca	Thursdays 10:00 to 11:00 am LSC-Psychology 2531 *or by appointment*
Teaching Assistant		
Lauren Giles		

Course Description

This course provides a survey of research methods in *Developmental Psychology*. It assumes knowledge of basic methodology and design and concentrates on methods of relevance to the study of human development. In addition to lectures, students conduct several research exercises to gain experience in conducting research with children.

Course Prerequisites: PSYO 2000.03 or NESC 2007.03, PSYO 2501.03, and PSYO 2090.03

Course Structure

The course is a lab course with both lectures and labs that will be delivered **in person**.

Lectures & Labs: **Tuesdays & Thursdays 8:35 am to 9:55 am in LSC-COMMON AREA C220**

*Note that in-class attendance for **Lab 3** and **all tests** is mandatory. Attendance will be taken.*

Course Learning Objectives and Outcomes

The purpose of the course is to familiarize students with issues related to conducting developmental research, including design, measurement, and ethical considerations. The course also is designed to provide an overview of existing research techniques that developmental researchers have specifically devised to study various aspects of development in infants, preschoolers, and young children. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- identify scientific questions that are developmental in nature.
- describe methodological strengths and weaknesses specific to developmental research and designs.
- articulate basic ethical principles and explain how challenges regarding each principle arise in developmental research.
- conduct different aspects of child research (including observing, coding, scoring, and analyzing data).
- identify basic methodologies used at different ages to assess sensorimotor, cognitive, socio-emotional, and language development.
- explain how and why studying developmental disorders provides a means of understanding development more generally.

Course Assessments

Assessment Components	**Weight (% of Final Grade)**	**Due Dates**
Tests *(in person)*		
Test 1 (Lectures 1-5)	24%	Oct 01 (80 minutes)
Test 2 (Lectures 6-9)	24%	Oct 29 (80 minutes)
Test 3 (Lectures 10-13)	24%	Dec 03 (80 minutes)

Labs *(to be submitted in "Assignments" or available in "Quizzes" on **Brightspace**. *Note. Lab 3 on Oct 15th is based on activities conducted in class; as such, attendance is mandatory for this lab.)*

Seven Labs (4% each)	28%	Lab 1-Oct 08; Lab 2-Oct 15; Lab 3-Oct 15*; Lab 4-Nov 05; Lab 5-Nov 19; Lab 6-Nov 26; Lab 7-Dec 10
Experimental Participation	**2 bonus** marks	
Total	**102** marks (maximum 100%)	

(PLEASE NOTE THAT PENALTIES ON LATE OR MISSING ITEMS AND SDAS ARE NOT APPLIED TO GRADES UNTIL THE END OF THE TERM.)

Conversion of numerical grades to Final Letter Grades follows the Dalhousie Grade Scale

A+ (90-100)	**B+** (77-79)	**C+** (65-69)	**D** (50-54)
A (85-89)	**B** (73-76)	**C** (60-64)	**F** (0-49)
A- (80-84)	**B-** (70-72)	**C-** (55-59)	

Course Materials

Online platform to be used: Brightspace

- *Students will need access to a computer with internet access to* **Brightspace** and other websites.

Lab Assignments are completed/submitted on **Brightspace** (except for Lab 3). **PDFs of Lecture Slides** as well as **video links** of examples and **required readings (library links or articles themselves)** will be made available on **Brightspace**

- Students will need to log into Dalhousie Libraries to access library links for the required readings when off campus.
- In class, we will watch video examples of research methods typically available from YouTube or other video sharing sites. Links to these will also be available on **Brightspace.**
- The course material I created for this course (e.g., lecture slides, lab assignments) are the product of my work and consequently, they are my intellectual property. Students may not distribute them to others (e.g., uploading to external/third-party websites, including unauthorized AI tools).

Course Policies Related to Academic Integrity

Test Integrity and Electronic Device Policy: To promote fairness and uphold Dalhousie University's standards of academic integrity, all tests in this course are conducted under a closed-device policy.

Permitted Items: Unless expressly authorized by the instructor, the only items permitted in a student's immediate testing area are: writing utensils (e.g., pens, pencils, erasers), tissues, medications, one water bottle/drink container, small snacks, and a Dalhousie student ID or other government-issued photo identification. No other items may be present on the desk, chair, floor space immediately surrounding the student, or in the testing area without prior authorization.

Prohibited Electronic Devices: Students may not possess, access, wear, handle, activate, or use any unauthorized electronic device during a test. Prohibited devices include, but are not limited to:

- mobile phones;
- tablets;
- laptops and computers;
- smartwatches;
- fitness trackers;
- smart rings;
- headphones and earbuds;
- electronic communication devices;
- smart eyewear;
- cameras or recording devices; and
- any clothing, accessory, or wearable technology capable of recording, transmitting, receiving, storing, processing, displaying, photographing, scanning, or reproducing information, including artificial-intelligence-enabled devices.

Complete Storage Separation: Prohibited devices may not be kept on a student's desk, chair, person, clothing, or in any pocket. All prohibited devices must be completely powered off before the test begins and stored in a backpack, bag, or other location designated by the instructor. Devices must remain inaccessible to the student for the duration of the test unless expressly authorized by the instructor.

Smart Eyewear and Accessibility Accommodations: Students who normally wear smart eyewear must use standard prescription glasses or contact lenses during tests unless otherwise authorized as an approved accommodation through their Student Accessibility Plan.

Medical Devices: Students who use a medical device that could reasonably be mistaken for a prohibited electronic device (for example, a continuous glucose monitor or hearing aid) are encouraged to notify the instructor in advance whenever possible. Approved medical devices may be used as required.

Examination Security: Tests, examination booklets, questions, and all associated materials remain the property of the instructor. Students may not photograph, scan, record, copy, reproduce, transmit, distribute, post online, or retain unauthorized copies of any test materials.

Monitoring and Academic Integrity: The instructor will monitor the testing environment before and during each test to ensure compliance with this policy. The possession, access, use, activation, handling, or discovery of an unauthorized electronic device during a test may constitute evidence of an irregularity and may result in the incident being documented and reported in accordance with Dalhousie University's academic integrity procedures. Any suspected academic offence will be addressed through the University's established processes and in accordance with applicable policies, procedures, accommodation obligations, and principles of procedural fairness.

Group Work: Students should complete labs on their own. Students cannot work together on any lab assignments (except Lab 3 in class).

Use of Generative AI and Large Language Models: Students cannot use generative AI and large language models (e.g., ChatGPT, C-Pilot) to complete lab assignments for this course.

See https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html for more information on what constitutes academic integrity. Maximum penalties will be imposed for any instance of plagiarism others' work or cheating during tests.

Additional Course Policies

Course Completion

To complete the course satisfactorily, students must fulfill all the requirements as set out in the course outline.

Course Announcements

All students are responsible for **all** announcements made in class ***even in their absence***. It is students' responsibility to get information ***from classmates*** (*not* from me) on any potential announcements made in class in their absence. ***Students are also responsible for knowing the information presented in this course syllabus.***

Professor and Teaching Assistant Availability

Due to the amount of time required to answer questions via email, I will respond to email inquiries as soon as possible during workdays/hours (Monday-Friday 9 am-5 pm). I *do not* respond to emails regarding information already available in the course syllabus, so please look here first. *All course-related emails should be directed to me, not the TA.* Please **do not drop by my office outside of my drop-in student office hours** without an appointment. However, feel free to drop by any time during my drop-in student office hours.

Cancelled Tests/Labs

Tests/labs that are cancelled because of a Dalhousie closure or other unlikely event will be held as soon as possible afterwards. For Tests 1-2 and Lab 3, they would be held during the next regular class time. Test 3 would be held sometime on Thursday, Dec 10th. Any lab that is cancelled will be held the following class when possible. If not, the lab will be recorded and provided to students on **Brightspace**.

Test Information

Tests are closed books (no aids allowed). The material covered in each test *will not be cumulative*, but some major concepts from the first part of the course (e.g., developmental designs) may still be relevant in Tests 2 and 3. Tests will include multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer questions.

Lab Information

Attendance at Lab 3 (and all three tests) is **mandatory** and attendance will be taken.

Most labs are due **before midnight (Halifax Time)** on Thursday nights and must be submitted on **Brightspace** (not Labs 2 & 3). **Late lab assignments** (except for Labs 2 and 3) without an approved SDA form will be deducted 1 mark out of 4 per day late (including weekend days). Therefore, Labs 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 will be worth zero on the fourth day late.

Lab 2 is due **Thursday Oct. 15th at 8:30 am** and cannot be submitted later than 8:30 am on **Brightspace (before Lab 3 takes place)**. It will be assigned a grade of zero immediately without an approved SDA form.

Lab 3 requires in-class attendance and will be marked based solely on participation during the lab itself (Thursday, Oct. 15th). Not attending Lab 3 on time without an approved SDA form will result in all marks lost. Penalties will also be imposed for *arriving late* or *leaving early* for Lab 3.

Requests for Regrades

Students must submit any request for a test or lab that they would like to be regraded **within one week of receiving the grade in question and/or the feedback**. In addition, students must provide a rationale for their request (e.g., calculation was wrong, part of response ungraded or missed). Students must recognize that marks can go down after a regrade, as the whole item will be regraded, not just the part identified.

Course Time Commitment Expectations

In a typical week, students will be expected to allocate approximately *1.5-2 hours* for reading required course readings, *3 hours* for attending lecture and labs and *2 hours* for completing lab assignments, along with studying for tests. Labs are only due during weeks in which there are no tests. Thus, students should expect to spend about 8-9 hours every week on this course.

Experimental Participation for Credit Points

Students can earn up to 2 bonus marks to their final course grade by taking part in experiments. 1 credit point will be awarded for each experimentation hour up to a maximum of 2 points. Students can sign up for experiments at https://www.dal.ca/faculty/science/psychology_neuroscience/research/credit-point-information/setting-up-a-sona-account.html. Students have until the last day of classes to assign credit points to Psyo3091.

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Course Policies on Missed or Late Academic Requirements

Course Accessibility

You are eligible for accommodations based on protected characteristics such as religion. If you have religious, cultural, or community-significant observances that conflict with course requirements, reach out to me to collaboratively find alternatives for completing the course requirements.

To begin the process of requesting a formal academic accommodation, contact the Student Accessibility Centre.

Any student who has a Student Accessibility Plan must ensure that their advisor in the Student Accessibility Centre forwards that plan to me. Make-up and/or prorating options for missed or late work will be developed on a case-by-case basis depending on the course component(s) missed and the student's specific accessibility plan.

Long-term versus short-term illnesses or other valid personal issue:

Long-term personal, mental, or physical health issues may require students to miss more than 5 days of school. If this occurs, then students will need to ***contact me asap so that we can develop a plan***. Students will be directed to the Student Accessibility Center and/or Patricia Laws (Assistant Dean of Student Affairs) for personal or health issues that require extended accommodations. Make-up and/or prorating options for missed or late work will be developed on a case-by-case basis depending on the course component(s) missed and the nature and extend of students' difficulties. ***Documentation from a professional may be required in the case of long-term issues.***

Short-term medical or personal issues are ones that require students to miss 5 or fewer school days because of distress or illness, or other personal issue.

- No documentation from professionals is required.
- Students must contact me ***before*** **or on the same day** as the component that is missed.
- Students are required to **submit** a Student Declaration of Absence (SDA) Form **via Brightspace** (upload in Assignments Section) within **one (1) week** from the date of absence.
- **Only one SDA form for a short-term issue will be allowed for this course over the entire term.**
- Any subsequent missed or late component will be penalized accordingly (i.e., students will not be allowed to "pick and choose" which component is to be penalized).

Missed components for an approved SDA for a short-term issue will be handled as follows:

Missed Test

- If a student misses **a test** and submits an approved SDA form, **they will need to write a make-up test**, which may have a different format from the regular test and will be held within a week of the original test date.

(Most) Missed Labs

- If a student cannot complete a lab (except for Labs 2 and 3) and submits an approved SDA form**, they will be allowed 5 extra days** (including weekend days) **to submit the assignment** without penalty.

Missed Lab 2 or 3

- If a student misses Lab 3 and/or cannot complete Lab 2 by class time for Lab 3 and submits an approved SDA form**, their final lab mark will be prorated without the missed lab(s).** As an example, I would use the other 5-6 labs and prorate the student's grade out of 28 (e.g., 28*Grade/24). *There will be **no** make-up Labs 2 or 3.*

NOTE: **Only one SDA form for a short-term medical- or personal-related absence will be allowed for this course** over the entire term and it will be allocated to missed components on a *chronological* basis. Any additional missed or late components that occur after the approved short-term absence has been allocated will be penalized as per the course syllabus.

Students **must contact me** before or on the day they will miss a component and **submit** the SDA form **via Brightspace** within **one (1) week** from the due date of the missed component. **If you do not submit the form within 7 days following the due date, you will receive a zero on the missed or late assessment.**

(PLEASE NOTE THAT PENALTIES ON LATE OR MISSING ITEMS AND SDAS ARE NOT APPLIED TO GRADES UNTIL THE END OF THE TERM.)

Course Content

Class Schedule

Each **Lab** assignment will be explained in person in class most **Thursdays 08:35 to 09:55 am Halifax Time** and most lab assignments will be due at least 7 days after they are assigned (usually on a Thursday night) before midnight. Lab 2 is due on Thursday, Oct 15th in the morning before class, and Lab 3 will be marked during the lab itself on Thursday, Oct 15th, so attendance is mandatory. Attendance is also mandatory during tests.

Lecture and Lab notes will be available on **Brightspace**.

Week	Tuesdays In-Class Activities 08:35-09:55 am	Thursdays In-Class Activities 08:35-09:55 am	Components Due This Week
Sep 08 & Sep 10	**Syllabus Information**	**Lecture 1** Development Designs	
Sep 15 & Sep 17	**Lecture 2** Confounds in Development Designs	**Lecture 3** Age as a Variable	
Sep 22 & Sep 24	**Lecture 4** Measuring Behaviour & Issues	**Lab 1** Designs, Variables, & Measurement **& Lecture 4 Continued**	
Sep 29 & Oct 01	**Lecture 5** Ethics	**Test 1 (Lectures 1-5): In Class**	****Test 1**** 24% (Thursday in class)
Oct 06 & Oct 08	**Lecture 6** Cognitive Development Infants	**Lab 2** Scoresheet Design **& Lecture 6 Continued**	**Lab 1** 4% (Thursday before midnight)
Oct 13 & Oct 15	**Lecture 7** Cognitive Development Preschoolers I	**Lab 3 Task Administration: In Class**	**Lab 2** 4% (*Thursday ***before*** class) ****Lab 3**** 4% (Thursday in class)
Oct 20 & Oct 22	**Lecture 8** Cognitive Development Preschoolers II	**Lab 4** Behavioural Coding	
Oct 27 & Oct 29	**Lecture 9** Language Development Infants	**Test 2 (Lectures 6-9): In Class**	****Test 2**** 24% (Thursday in class)
Nov 03 & Nov 05	**Lecture 10** Language Development Preschoolers	**Lab 5** Results & Discussion I Cognitive Task **& Lecture 10 Continued**	**Lab 4** 4% (Thursday before midnight)
Nov 10 & Nov 12	*Study Week (no classes)*		
Nov 17 & Nov 19	**Lecture 11** Socioemotional Development Infants	**Lab 6** Language MLU Coding **& Lecture 11 Continued**	**Lab 5** 4% (Thursday before midnight)
Nov 24 & Nov 26	**Lecture 12** Socioemotional Development Preschoolers	**Lab 7** Results & Discussion II Behavioural Coding **& Lecture 12 Continued**	**Lab 6** 4% (Thursday before midnight)
Dec 01 & Dec 03	**Lecture 13** Developmental Disorders	**Test 3 (Lectures 10-13): In Class**	****Test 3**** 24% (Thursday in class)
Dec 08 & Dec 10	No class (Monday classes)	*If Test 3 needs to be rescheduled because of Dalhousie closure, it will be scheduled for Thursday, Dec 10 (time to be determined).*	**Lab 7** 4% (Thursday before midnight)

List of Required Readings

Some readings are available on **Brightspace**, while others can be obtained using links provided on **Brightspace** or reference information below (*ensure that you are logged into the Dalhousie Libraries when attempting to access links off campus*).

Lecture 1 Development Designs

- Robinson, K., Schmidt, T., & Teti, D. M. (2005). Issues in the use of longitudinal and cross-sectional designs. *Handbook of research methods in developmental science* (pp. 3-20). Malden, MA: Blackwell. PDF on **Brightspace.**

Lecture 2 Confounds in Development Designs

- Finish the Robinson, Schmidt, & Teti (2005) chapter.

Lecture 3 Age as a Variable

- Hamlin, J. K., Wynn, K., & Bloom, P. (2007). Social evaluation by preverbal infants. *Nature*, *450*(7169), 557-559. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature06288

Lecture 4 Measuring Behaviour & Issues

- Fombonne, E. (2025). The acetaminophen scare: Association vs causation. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *66*(11), 1621-1626. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.70064

Lecture 5 Ethics

- Kazdin, A. E., & Benjet, C. (2003). Spanking children: Evidence and issues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 12(3),* 99-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.01239

Lecture 6 Cognitive Development Infants

- Oakes, L. M. (2010). Using habituation of looking time to assess mental processes in infancy. *Journal of Cognition and Development, 11(3),* 255-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/15248371003699977

Lecture 7 Cognitive Development Preschoolers I

- Wellman, H. M. (2017). The development of theory of mind: Historical reflections. *Child Development Perspectives,* 11,207–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12236

Lecture 8 Cognitive Development Preschoolers II

- Zelazo, P. D. (2006). The Dimensional Change Card Sort (DCCS): A method of assessing executive function in children. *Nature Protocols*, *1*(1), 297-301. https://www.nature.com/articles/nprot.2006.46.pdf

Lecture 9 Language Development Infants

- DeCasper, A.J., & Fifer, W.P. (1980). Of human bonding: Newborns prefer their mothers' voices. *Science, 208,* 1174-1176. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.7375928

Lecture 10 Language Development Preschoolers

- Aslin, R. N., Saffran, J. R., & Newport, E. L. (1998). Computation of conditional probability statistics by 8-month-old infants. *Psychological Science*, *9*(4), 321-324. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00063
- Choi, Y., Kim, E. Y., Lee, H., & Song, H. J. (2025). Before first words: Infants' ability to map words to goals. *Infant Behavior and Development*, *81*, 102154. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2025.102154

Lecture 11 Socioemotional Development Infants

- Ainsworth, M.S. (1979). Infant-mother attachment. *American Psychologist, 34,* 932-937. PDF on **Brightspace.**
- Shiner, R. L., Buss, K. A., McClowry, S. G., Putnam, S. P., Saudino, K. J., & Zentner, M. (2012). What is temperament now? Assessing progress in temperament research on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Goldsmith et al. *Child Development Perspectives*, *6*(4), 436-444. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00254.x

Lecture 12 Socioemotional Development Preschoolers

- Smetana, J. G. (2017). Current research on parenting styles, dimensions, and beliefs. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *15*, 19-25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.02.012

Lecture 13 Developmental Disorders

- Vivanti, G., Hamner, T., & Lee, N. R. (2018). Neurodevelopmental disorders affecting sociability: Recent research advances and future directions in autism spectrum disorder and Williams syndrome. *Current Neurology and Neuroscience Reports*, *18*(12), 1-9. https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11910-018-0902-y.pdf

Syllabus Appendix

Student Supports & University Statements, Policies, and Guidelines can be found here.