Language & Literacy Development

Syllabus

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience

PSYO 3093 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 Instructor(s)

Name	Email	Office Hours
Dr. S. **Hélène Deacon**	helene.deacon@dal.ca	**TO be announced**: LSC 2335 and by online link
Cassandra Azzopardi	cazzopardi@dal.ca	As needed

Course Description

This course examines the cognitive and linguistic processes underlying language acquisition and how they interact in influencing the development of language and literacy abilities.

Course Prerequisites

PSYO 2000.03 or NESC 2007.03, and PSYO 2090.03

Student Resources

List and describe the additional resources available to students (e.g., office hours, resource centers, etc.). Make sure to include when, where and how students can access these resources.

Course Structure

Course Delivery

This Is an in person course. All exams must be written in person.

Lectures

Wed and Fridays 10:05-11:25 in C204-206

Course Materials

There is **no textbook** for this course. Instead, I have assigned readings for each week (readings are noted in the "Course Content" section below, and all **readings are posted on Brightspace** with the corresponding lecture module.

The readings include a combination of empirical and review articles. I chose each reading to **complement** the lectures, but my lectures will never be a direct recap of the readings. There will be information in the readings that is **not** covered in class .

Likewise, there will be information in the lectures that is **not** covered in readings. In other words, don't skip the lectures and rely solely on the readings—that won't get you very far!

Learning Objectives

The list below outlines our course objectives. These objectives reflect what you should be able to do at the end of the course, and (perhaps more importantly) they reflect big-picture concepts that I hope will stick with you after the course ends.

1. Describe key processes involved in typical and atypical language & literacy development.
2. Understand the methods that researchers use to study language & literacy development.
3. Critically evaluate information about language & literacy development, including what is generated by AI as 'knowledge'.
4. Apply your knowledge of language & literacy development to practical situations.

In other words, this course will give you **foundation** in the science of language and literacy development, will help you to become a **critical consumer** of research in the field, and will help you **translate** your newfound knowledge to reality.

Assessment

EXAMS (90% total). You will write two exams in this course; these will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer and longer answer questions.

The questions will assess your **comprehension** of the material, and will also ask you to **apply, analyze, and synthesize**. Study with that in mind—memorizing details won't be enough! For example, I might describe a hypothetical child and ask you to discuss her case using what you've learned about language disorders. I might describe a study that we did ***not*** cover in class and ask you to interpret it in light of a theory we ***did*** cover. In all cases, I'll be evaluating the extent to which show an understanding of—and ability to think critically & scientifically about—the material. That said, I recognize that you're having to think on your feet, and I grade accordingly!

Your **lowest** exam score will be worth 35% of your grade, and your **highest** exam score will be worth 55% of your grade. I will automatically calculate two versions of your final grade and use whichever version gives you your best possible final score.

Will the final be cumulative? The final exam will be **"loosely" cumulative**, in that (1) some topics come up throughout the course, and (2) some pre-midterm topics are related to postmidterm topics (e.g., vocabulary development is related to reading comprehension).

However, the final exam will focus on material from Modules 7–12. If topics from before the midterm come up, they won't surprise you—they'll be cases where there's a clear connection to things we learned after the midterm.

There will be a set time for students to make up the exam, if they need to miss it (using SDA). Students who would like an alternative time will need to provide documentation.

Note: Bring two sharpened No. 2 pencils, a pen and an eraser to each exam.

IN-CLASS WORKSHEETS (10% total). You will get 6 opportunities over the course of the term to do a worksheet in class, paired up with a peer. You can drop one of these. These can only be completed in class, as grading reflects your participation in class.

BONUS: you can earn an extra 2% for completing studies through SONA. Please log into https://dalpsyc.sona-systems.com/default.aspx

Conversion of numerical grades to final letter grades follows the **undergraduate*** Dalhousie Grade Scale

*(*for graduate courses, be sure to include the graduate 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 Policies on Missed or Late Academic Requirements

You can submit one Student Declaration of Absence form. You should submit this form before the deadline. I will work with you to arrange an **extension** (of a length appropriate to your situation; this will be the first option explored) or **re-weighting** of your completed course components (offered only if an extension is not logistically possible).

I will make reasonable exceptions for late declaration forms is circumstances warrant it (e.g., if you cannot access email for an extended period—say, during an extended power outage or hospitalization).

Course Policies related to Academic Integrity & Artificial Intelligence

As is typical for in class exams, you can study with other students, but each student is responsible for writing their own exam.

You are welcome to discuss assignments with your peers, share ideas, and give each other feedback. However, **the work you ultimately submit must be your own**.

You can use AI to generate study materials; note that I suspect that these will be less effective than those generated on your own.

AI AND YOUR LEARNING

This course is designed to help you build knowledge and understanding in [subject]. AI tools can help you study, but using them to complete assessments meant to test or build your understanding is likely to harm your learning and leave you unprepared for exams, advanced coursework, and research. If you use AI tools, do so in a way that supports rather than undermines your learning.

WHAT AI TOOLS ARE

AI tools use algorithms and large datasets to generate, summarize, analyze, or revise text, images, or code in response to prompts. Examples include text generators (e.g., ChatGPT), grammar and editing tools (e.g., Grammarly), AI search and summarization tools (e.g., Perplexity), and transcription or translation services (e.g., Otter.ai). They can speed up some tasks, but they do not replace independent thinking, subject knowledge, or scholarly judgment.

WHY CAUTION IS WARRANTED

AI tools generate text from statistical patterns, not an understanding of truth or evidence; they can produce confident-sounding but incorrect explanations and unreliable or fabricated citations. You remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of everything you submit. In particular:

- using AI to complete coursework limits your development in reasoning, data interpretation, and scientific literacy;
- short-term gains from AI can mean weaker preparation for upper-year courses, labs, research, and professional programs;

- relying on AI in place of your own thinking can impair retention, problem-solving, and exam readiness.

AI AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

In this course, AI use is governed by the same expectations that apply to all academic work under Dalhousie's academic-integrity regulations (Intellectual Honesty; confirm the relevant Faculty regulation). Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor, AI use that replaces or obscures your own intellectual work is unauthorized assistance and a form of academic misconduct. You are also responsible for protecting the privacy and intellectual property of others.

Use of Generative AI (Copilot Chat): According to Dalhousie and Nova Scotia privacy laws, instructors are not permitted to require students to use generative AI other than Microsoft 365 Copilot Chat, which is a free AI-powered tool included with all Dalhousie accounts. The following table describes for which purposes and tasks you are required, allowed, and prohibited to use generative AI (Copilot Chat) in this course. If generative AI is used in cases where it is not permitted, it will be considered an academic integrity offence, and you will be subject to appropriate disciplinary and/or corrective measures.

WHAT IS AND ISN'T ALLOWED

Permission does not equal endorsement; the primary risk is to your own learning and progression.

1. Learning support and independent study — you may: have concepts explained in different words; generate practice questions or flashcards; summarize assigned readings or lecture material for study; clarify terminology or methods.

2. Recordings, slides, and posted materials — you may: create personal summaries, outlines, or study guides, and translate content for accessibility. **You may not:** upload lecture recordings, slides, assessments, or other instructor materials to external AI platforms without permission (these are protected by copyright).

3. Assessment-specific.

In-person exams: AI may be used to study beforehand, but no AI use is permitted during the exams.

In-class worksheets: no AI use is permitted during the completion of the worksheets.

Course Accessibility

Please refer to the Student Accommodation Policy for information on how Dalhousie instructors and staff work collaboratively with students to create and sustain an accessible educational environment.

- 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

Course Content

	Module Dates #	Topic	Readings
1	September 9, 11; 1	Early Language Acquisition	Kuhl (2004): for Modules 1 *and* 2
2	September 16, 18; 2	Discovering Language Units	Kuhl (2004) Thiessen & Saffran (2003)
3	September 23, 25; 3	Word Learning & Vocabulary	Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek (2006) Hart & Risley (1995) Commentary on Hart & Risley
	September 30	Truth and Reconciliation Day	No class
4	October 2, 7; 4	Grammatical Development	Tomasello (2011)
5	October 9, 14; 5	Raising Language Learners (bilingualism in atypical language development; technology)	Genesee (2015)
6	October 16, 21; 6	Pragmatics: Communication Breakdowns	No readings this week!
	October 23	**MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS**.	
7	October 28, 30; 7	Developmental Language Disorder	Leonard (2014) McGregor (2020)
8	Nov 4, 6; 8	Emergent and Home Literacy	van Bergen et al. (2017)
	Nov 11, 13	**FALL BREAK** (no classes)	
9	Nov. 18, 20; 9	Word Reading Development	Ziegler & Goswami (2006) Deacon et al. (2018)
10	Nov. 25 & 27; 10	Developmental Dyslexia	Tunmer & Greaney (2010)
11	Dec 2 and 4; 11	Reading Comprehension Development	Oakhill & Cain (2016)

12	December 9; 12	Children's Reading Trajectories	Northrom (2017)
	Exam Period	**FINAL EXAM** available (emphasizes Module 7–12 lectures & associated readings) Start date & time to be determined by the Registrar.	

Syllabus Appendix

Syllabus Appendix: Student Supports & University Statements, Policies, and Guidelines