

**24.902/24.932: *Language and its structure II: Syntax***

Fall, 2017

**class times:** TR 2:30-4

**web site:** <http://web.mit.edu/norvin/www/24.902/24902.html>

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This course will acquaint you with some of the important results and ideas of the last half-century or so of research in syntax. We will explore a large number of issues, and a large amount of data, so that you can learn something of what this field is all about. The class will emphasize ideas and arguments for these ideas, in addition to the details of particular analyses. At the same time, you will learn the mechanics of one particular approach (sometimes called *Minimalist* syntax).

The class assumes some familiarity with basic concepts of theoretical linguistics, of the kind you could acquire in 24.900.

***Requirements***

**Readings and attendance:** There is no textbook for this class. Readings will appear on the webpage, linked to the relevant days on the course schedule. Some of the readings will be optional (and these will be marked).

It is *strongly recommended* that you do the reading, which is provided to help you understand the material. **Your primary source of information, however, should be the class itself.** If you find discrepancies between what is said in class and what you find in the readings, please do tell us about them; when in doubt, however, you should believe us, not the readings.

Therefore: **Attendance and participation in all classes is obligatory.**

**Section:** Abdul-Razak Sulemana will run a section (at a time to be determined); attendance is not obligatory, but is encouraged.

**Problem sets:** There will be problem sets every week or so. These are due one week after they are handed out.

**Late policy:** In general, late problem sets will not be accepted except by *e-mailed* permission of the instructor *requested before the due date*.

Permission, if granted, will be granted in two categories. For illness and similar emergencies, you will not be penalized for handing in the problem set late. If we decide that your excuse does not involve an emergency, then you will be given permission to hand in the problem set late, but your grade on the problem set will go down by one letter grade for every day it is late.

You are encouraged to discuss the class with your classmates, and general discussion of the problem sets is fine—even encouraged. But make sure you arrive at the solution yourself, and write your own answers.

**Laptop policy:** You should feel free to use laptops in class (though not, of course, during the midterm). We reserve the right to change this policy.

**Paper:** You will also write a short paper (around 4000 words) on a syntax topic. The paper can be of several possible types. One option is to write a review paper of one of the optional readings (or of some other relevant paper; feel free to talk with us about other papers you might write about), clearly describing its claims and argumentation and offering your opinion (with arguments!) of how well justified these claims are. Another would be what linguists call a *squib*. A squib is a short paper describing a pattern of facts that you find interesting along with an exploration of their possible significance. You might discover these facts yourself, as you sit in class, talk with friends, or read the newspaper—or you might read them in a reference grammar or linguistics book. The paper should contain an organized description of the phenomenon, explain its interest and significance, and suggest how you might analyze it. For an entire professional journal devoted to squibs, see <http://www.ledonline.it/snippets/>. Another place to look for syntax papers is the online archive LingBuzz (<http://lingbuzz.auf.net/lingbuzz>).

The paper will be **due on December 12**, but you should settle on a topic (and notify us of it) no later than **November 9**. Please discuss your topic with us in advance of the due date. If you think you're having difficulty in finding a topic, please come see me and we will find something appropriate.

**Mid-term:** In the middle of the term, there will be a mid-term, covering the material we have studied up to that point. For purposes of computing your grade, it will count as much as one problem set.

**Final exam:** There will be no final exam.

**Grade computation:**

Problem sets/midterm: 70%

paper: 20%

attendance/participation: 10%