

Language of Love: Courtship Communication Across the Animal Kingdom

FYS 196 – Fall 2019

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Meeting time: 2:45 – 4:00 pm
 Tuesday & Thursdays
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Office hours: Mondays 3:00 – 4:00; Thursdays 12:00 – 1:00,
 or by appointment (email me!)

I love talking with students and encourage you all to come early and often to office hours. ***I would be happy to see each one of you at least once during the semester***, so drop by even if you don't have a particular question. If you cannot attend office hours, let me know and we'll schedule an appointment outside the regular office hour time.



Course Site: <https://moodle.smith.edu/course/view.php?id=35288>

Required texts: All readings for this course will be made available on the course Moodle site.

What is courtship communication?

We'll explore the different ways that animals chat with each other in hopes of finding (and evaluating) a potential mate, including birds that moonwalk and mice that sing. We will also touch on the relevant hormones and brain circuits that enable animal "languages" and perception, as well as communication tactics employed for other essential behaviors (e.g. parental care). Throughout the course, we will discuss a variety of readings, including primary science articles and popular press pieces.

In addition to understanding how animals communicate, we'll also work towards becoming more effective science communicators and learn the skills needed to translate complex information for a range of non-scientific audiences.

What should you be able to do by the end of the semester?

- Appreciate the diverse range of communication signals that have evolved across animals
- Understand the value of science communication and how to be an effective science communicator
- Navigate scientific databases and read primary research articles
- Write with a public audience in mind using proper grammar

What are the course policies & mechanics?

Workload and time commitment expectations: For every 4-credit class, [Smith expects students to spend 9 hours per week outside of class](#) on readings, research, and other assignments. I have been careful to develop assignments with these guidelines in mind (e.g., there is real work to be done this semester, but not too much, and not all at once).

Participation: In-class discussions are important for the success of this class. As such, be sure to ask questions and be an active participant in class discussions. Everyone should prepare to speak at least once per class (be it a comment, question, etc.). Additionally, please stop me during a lecture if you have *any* questions -- it's likely someone else is wondering the same thing.

Late work: We all get sick, there are religious events, or something unfortunate might transpire (e.g. loss of a family member). I understand that life happens. As long as you keep in contact with me, we can work out an arrangement and extensions can be granted on a case-by-case basis. However, in all other circumstances (i.e. just forgetting to turn something in), late papers, assignments, etc. will be marked down 5% per day, including weekends. If you foresee needing an extension because of an emergency, come see me in person during my office hours or contact me by email as soon as possible.

Accommodations: I invite all students to come speak with me one-on-one to discuss how, together, we can best meet your learning needs. Any student requiring accommodations in order to complete assignments during and outside of class must be registered with the Office of Disability Services and provide documentation of the requested accommodations in advance of any deadline. Please contact Laura Rauscher, Disability Services Director or visit <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services>.

Academic Honesty: During all portions of this course, students are expected to follow the Smith College Honor Code explicitly. In addition, some assignments will involve collaboration with other students, whereas others will be independent. You must always turn in your own work when instructed to do so. Any significant similarity between two students' assignments will be investigated as a possible breach of the Honor Code. Ask your professor if you are uncertain about the expectations for any assignment. For further details, please refer to the [Student Handbook](#).

Mountain Day: Mountain Day is a fun, yet unpredictable, Smith tradition. If Mountain Day is called on the day an assignment is due, the deadline will be extended by one day.

How will you and I evaluate your progress?

Assignment	Pts	%
Observation paper	100	20%
Pop sci article	100	20%
Think Explainer	100	20%
Podcast	100	20%
Grammar checks (5 pts each; 10 total)	50	10%
Misc. in-class activities & mini-assignments	50	10%
Total points available	500	

Grading scheme

93– 100	A	80– 82	B-	67– 69	D+
90– 92	A-	77– 79	C+	63– 66	D
87– 89	B+	73– 76	C	60– 62	D-
83– 86	B	70– 72	C-	< 60	F

What are the major assignments in this course?

Check the course Moodle site regularly for more information for each assignment, upload links, and relevant assignment resources.

- **Observation paper (750 - 1000 words)**
 - Students will practice being objective observers of animal behavior (hopefully in the wild, depending on logistics!). Afterwards, students will write an objective, vivid, and descriptive write-up of their observations, followed by a developed hypothesis explaining one of the observed behaviors based on (at least one) previous research findings.
- **Pop science articles (500 – 750 words)**
 - Students will write a lay-language summary of a primary science article in the style of a *New York Times* “Science” section (e.g. *Trilobites*, or Carl Zimmer) or *The Atlantic* (e.g. Ed Yong) article.
- **Thing Explainer (variable words; 10 blurbs/paragraphs minimum – word count variable and TBD)**
 - Students will select and research an animal and its communication system and create an [Up-Goer Five](#) *xkcd* cartoon based on their selected topic.
- **Podcast (6 – 8 minutes; apx. 1500 - 2000 words)**
 - Students will work in pairs to write and produce a short podcast on an animal communication research article.
- **Grammar checks (10x; lowest scored dropped)**
 - Students will take a weekly quiz covering common writing mistakes and grammar. All prep material and quizzes will be available online. There will be 10 available and your lowest score on one will be dropped. These are all open note, internet, etc. quizzes. I encourage you to work with classmates together on them – my hope is these are a refresher and/or a low-stakes way to improve the mechanics of your writing. These are due by midnight the day they’re due.

Are there any opportunities for extra credit?

Yes!

- **Experiential Reflections (up to 50 pts, max.)**
 - Throughout the semester, you’re encouraged attend both technical science talks (e.g. colloquium) and science communication presentations “in the wild”. At the end of the semester, students will write a reflection of their experiential learning, including information specific to each experience. Students will discuss how their experiential learning increased their knowledge of science communication.
 - You can submit up to 5 reflections maximum; 1 per talk, science café, etc.
 - Each one is worth up to 10 pts.
 - Each write-up should be around 250-375 words per write-up along with a completed evaluation sheet (see course Moodle for eval sheet).
 - See the course Moodle page for the doc entitled, “Local sci comm experiences & science talks” (found under “Course Resources” topic)