

# Introduction to Syntax

## ALIN 321 / AANT 321

### Fall 2017

**Time:** Thursday 5:45 – 7:05

**Location:** Humanities Building, Room 0132

**Instructor:** Leland Kusmer

**Office:** Arts & Sciences Building, Room 239

**Office Hours:** Thursday 1:00 – 4:00 & by appointment

*As a prerequisite for this course, you should have already taken one of the following courses: ALIN 220, AANT 220, or AENG 217. If you do not meet this prerequisite, please come to my office hours on Thursday, 9/3 or schedule a meeting with me ASAP.*

## I Course description

This course provides an introduction to syntactic theory — the theoretical study of the syntactic structure of human language. Syntax is the level of linguistic structure that determines how words combine to form phrases and how phrases combine to form sentences. Syntacticians seek to uncover the hidden structure of linguistic data and to develop theories capable of explaining the set of rules that generate all the possible sentences of a linguistic system, while simultaneously ruling out all the impossible ones.

We will be working within the context of *generative grammar*, the approach to syntactic theory pioneered by the linguist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky (and now almost everyone who identifies as a theoretical linguist) believes that certain aspects of language are innate. In part, this means that you know the rules necessary to generate and understand an infinite number of sentences in your language(s), because a subset of those rules – called *Universal Grammar* – are hardwired into your brain. There is a lot of debate in linguistics about what Universal Grammar actually is, but considerably less disagreement about the idea that certain aspects of language are innate.

Because English is the language of our classroom, we will be spending a lot of time looking at data from English. However, because we are interested in the principle that certain aspects of language are innate and the idea of Universal Grammar (not just the grammar of English), we will spend a lot of time with data from a diverse variety of languages. You will never be asked to memorize facts about a particular language, but you will be asked to analyze data from a language you have never encountered before. I hope that this course stimulates a great appreciation for the complexity of human language, a deeper understanding of your own native language (whatever that may be), and a new curiosity for linguistic diversity in your community and around the world.

### I.1 Course goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to

- Apply the scientific method to the study of syntax

- Identify the parts of speech by their distribution and define them structurally
- Use constituency tests and phrase structure rules to draw trees for sentences in English and other languages
- Provide arguments for different concepts from theoretical linguistics such as Universal Grammar, Principles and Parameters, movement, and agreement

## 2 Course requirements

### 2.1 Reading

The required textbook for this course is *Syntax: A Generative Introduction, Third Edition* by Andrew Carnie (2013). This textbook is available at the UAlbany Bookstore. If you buy your textbook elsewhere, take care to order the right edition. This text will also be required reading for Advanced Syntax (A LIN 421 / A ANT 421), so hang onto this book if you think you may continue to enroll in syntax courses!

### 2.2 Video lectures

This course is a partially-online course, meaning that about half of the teaching will be in the form of video lectures. You are expected to watch all video lectures before the start of class on Thursday. The Thursday meeting will function primarily as a discussion section for the videos, and will often be quite difficult to follow without knowing the content of the videos.

The new videos for the next week will be posted by the end of the day on Friday.

### 2.3 Attendance

I expect you to attend class, but I will not be keeping track of attendance. If you have to miss class, consider...

- Asking a friend for notes
- Working through the in-class activities on Blackboard
- Coming to office hours to discuss those activities *after* you have completed them

I will not post answer keys to in-class activities or discuss them over email. It is your responsibility to catch up if you miss class.

### 2.4 Assignments

Assignments will be due on Thursdays of most weeks. Only assignments submitted by their deadline are eligible for full credit.

- Assignments submitted less than 24 hours late are worth 75% of their earned value.
- Assignments submitted 24 – 48 hours late are worth 50% of their earned value.

I will not accept assignments more than 48 hours after their deadline. However, the assignment with the lowest score will not be counted toward your final grade. Dropping your lowest score is your “escape hatch,” because I understand about migraines, power outages, and 21st birthdays. Use your escape hatch wisely, because I will not make exceptions to my late assignment policy unless your excuse is legitimately documented. Note that fraudulent excuses are considered violations of academic integrity and are grounds for academic or disciplinary penalties. Here is some more information about submitting assignments:

- I will not accept any hand-drawn trees; assignments (even trees) must be typed.<sup>1</sup>
- All assignments must be saved as PDFs.
- All assignments must be submitted electronically via Blackboard.
- I will not grade assignments that do not meet all of these conditions.

## 2.5 Exams

An in-class midterm exam is scheduled for October 19th. The final exam for this class will be given during the scheduled final examination period. Excuses for which I may grant a makeup include illness, tragedy, emergency, and religious observance. In all cases, I expect to be notified as soon as possible, and I expect you to provide me with documentation in support your request. Again, fraudulent excuses are considered violations of academic integrity and are grounds for academic or disciplinary penalties.

If you have three final exams scheduled on one day, you have the right to a make-up exam. You must make a request for such an exam no later than two weeks before the last day of classes of the given semester.

## 3 Grading

If you are enrolled in this course as a graduate student, please see me for an appendix to the syllabus, because the following information about grade distribution does not apply to you.

For undergraduate students, your final grade will be broken down as follows:

- Assignments: 70%
- Midterm: 10%
- Final Exam: 20%

The following grading scale will be applied to final grades:

A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%	B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%
B-: 80-82%	C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 63-66%	D-: 60-62%	E: 0-59%

<sup>1</sup>I recommend <http://www.tycho.iel.unicamp.br/phpsyntaxtree/> for drawing trees; you may use whatever system you like as long as it is equally legible. There is a YouTube tutorial for PHPSyntaxTree available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUs13cuiVDM>.

## 4 Educational Technology

### 4.1 Course site

If you have any trouble accessing the course site on Blackboard, please notify me immediately. Access to the course site is a requirement of the course.

### 4.2 Email

Please email [321syntax@lelandpaul.com](mailto:321syntax@lelandpaul.com) with questions concerning the content of the course. This policy helps to ensure that I respond to your email in a timely fashion. I will check this email at least once per day, so you can expect a response within 24 hours.

I look forward to getting to know you, and I encourage you to contact me with questions. However, I will not engage in lengthy email correspondence. If you do not understand an explanation after one attempt over email, I will ask you to come to my office hours or set up an appointment. In addition, I will not discuss my grading policy, your assignment grades, or final grades over email. If you want to discuss anything pertaining to your grade, you are more than welcome to come to my office hours or set up an appointment.

### 4.3 Electronic devices

I recognize that electronic devices can be useful classroom tools. As such, please feel free to use your electronic devices with an appropriate level of discretion. If, during class, the use of an electronic device becomes distracting, I will ask you to put it away.

## 5 Academic Integrity

Every student has the responsibility to become familiar with the standards of academic integrity at the University: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)

Student ignorance, unintentional error, or personal or academic pressures cannot be excuses for violation of academic integrity. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the standards and behaving accordingly, and UAlbany faculty are responsible for teaching, modeling and upholding them. Anything less undermines the worth and value of our intellectual work, and the reputation and credibility of the University at Albany degree.

## 6 Reasonable accommodation

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). Students are responsible for giving their professors academic accommodation letters as close to the beginning of the term as possible.

## 7 Schedule (subject to change)

All readings are to be done by the date listed; all assignments are due by the start of the following class meeting.

Class	Topic	Reading	Assignment
PART 1: PRELIMINARIES			
Aug 31	Generative Grammar	Ch 1	HW1
Sep 7	Parts of Speech	Ch 2	HW2
Sep 14	Trees & Rules	Ch 3.1 & 3.2	HW3
Sep 21	<b>No class: Rosh Hashanah</b>		
Sep 28	Constituency & Modification	Ch 3.3–6	HW4
Oct 5	Structural Relations	Ch 4	HW5
PART 2: THE BASE			
Oct 12	Binding Theory	Ch 5	
Oct 19	<b>Midterm</b>		
Oct 26	X-bar Theory	Ch 6	HW6
Nov 2	Extending X-bar Theory	Ch 7	HW7
Nov 9	Constraining X-bar Theory	Ch 8	HW8
PART 3: MOVEMENT			
Nov 16	Head-to-Head Movement	Ch 10	HW9
Nov 23	<b>No class: Thanksgiving</b>		
Nov 30	DP Movement	Ch 11	HW10
Dec 7	Review	Study!	