

Ling 201: Introduction to Language

Updated 20 January 2026

The College of Staten Island, CUNY

Spring 2026

Day/Time: Mondays, 6:30–9:50pm

Room: 2S-221

Website: <https://ling201spr2026.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/>

Instructor: Joseph Pentangelo

joseph.pentangelo@csi.cuny.edu

- Please don't send emails to "cix.csi.cuny.edu" – I won't see them.
- Please include "Ling 201" in the subject of any emails for this class.

Office Hours: Mondays, 5:30–6:30pm, 2S-225 (in-person)

Email me to set up a remote office hour meeting.

Catalogue Description:

This course is an introduction to the study of language. It explores the following relationships: language and society; language and culture; language and thought; language and biology. For English majors and minors, this is designated as an ENH linguistics course.

1. Requirements

Readings:

Expect to read about 20 pages per week, selected from the following books:

- *Language Files*, 12th edition (2016)
- *The 5 Minute Linguist*, edited by E.M. Rickerson and Barry Hilton (2007)
- *A Little Book of Language*, by David Crystal (2010)
- *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages*, edited by Christopher Moseley (2007)

All readings are available on the Readings page of our course site. The password to access this page will be shared with you during our first in-person class meeting.

Grading:

Your grade breakdown is as follows:

- Participation: 30%
- Exams: 30%

Grade Key			
A	93%+	B-	80–82%
A-	90–92%	C+	77–79%
B+	87–89%	C	70–76%
B	83–86%	D	60–69%
	F	<60%	

- Quizzes: 20%
- Assignments: 20%

Participation:

To earn full participation credit, you must participate substantively in at least 2/3 of all class meetings, i.e. in 8 out of 12 classes. (Nobody earns participation credit on the days of the midterm or the final.) If you participate in fewer days than this, you lose 4 points—that is, 4% of your overall grade—for each day that you did not participate. So if you participated in a total of:

8 classes → 30 points. Perfect!	4 classes → 14 points
7 classes → 26 points. Okay!	3 classes → 10 points
6 classes → 22 points. Alright!	2 classes → 6 points
5 classes → 18 points	1 class → 2 points

Exams:

There are two exams: the midterm and the final. Each of these is graded out of a maximum of 15 points and consists of 30 multiple choice questions worth a half-point each. The midterm covers weeks 1–6 and the final covers weeks 8–13. The final is not cumulative.

Both exams are open book for any printed materials (including readings, slides, your notebook, textbook, etc.), but you may not use your cellphone, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or any device with internet connectivity during either exam. You also may not share print materials with others in the class.

Quizzes:

There are a total of eleven short-answer quizzes on subject matter related to the reading due on the day that the quiz is administered. Quizzes are given at the start of most classes (exceptions: first class and exam days). Each quiz is graded out of a maximum of 2 points (i.e. 2% of your overall grade). The lowest-scoring quiz will be dropped, giving you a maximum of 20 points for your quiz grade. Quizzes are closed book.

Quizzes must be completed and submitted within the first 10 minutes of class (i.e. by 6:40pm). Makeup quizzes are only given in the case of excused absences (see below), and must be taken during the following week’s office hour.

Assignments:

There are two group assignments to be completed collaboratively outside of class, each graded out of a maximum of 10 points. Assignments have a written component as well as an

in-class presentation component. Details of these assignments will be given to you a week or two before they are due.

2. Policies

Reading:

Expect to read about 20 pages (or about 30 minutes to two hours, depending on your reading speed) before each week's class. You are required to do all of the assigned readings. You will be quizzed on each reading at the start of class, and your participation grade depends upon you having read what you were assigned.

Attendance:

You are expected to attend each class meeting. There are two types of absences: excused and unexcused. Any absence counts against your participation credit: even if your absence is excused, be sure to participate substantively in at least eight class sessions to earn the full 30% for participation. In the case of any absence, excused or otherwise, you are responsible for doing any missed readings and being caught up on course materials.

Excused Absences:

If you know that you will have to miss a class (due to illness, family emergency, etc.), let me know ahead of time or as soon as possible, include proof, and you'll be granted an excused absence. With an excused absence, you will be able to make up that day's missed quiz during my office hour the following week.

Unexcused Absences:

In the case of an unexcused absence, your quiz grade for that day will be a 0. 2 unexcused absences will lead to a deduction of 5 points from your overall grade. 3 or more unexcused absences will lead to a withdrawal grade, either WN or WU (depending on the time in the semester). You will not earn any credit for the class.

Artificial Intelligence:

The use of ChatGPT or similar artificial intelligence software to help you understand the reading materials is permitted. The use of this technology to generate your submission for academic work, including on quizzes, exams, or group assignments, is completely prohibited and will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment. A second offense will lead to an F in the class.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating:

In short, there is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism or cheating. You are referred to the College of Staten Island's Academic Integrity Policy, found here:

<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/academic-integrity-policy/>

Statement on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

You are referred to the CUNY Procedures for Implementing Reasonable Accommodations and Academic Adjustments, found here:

<https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/reasonable-accommodations-and-academic-adjustments/Reasonable-Accommodations-and-Academic-Adjustments-2016.pdf>

3. Course Calendar

The below calendar is largely self-explanatory. Readings must be done before class, while quizzes and exams will be done in class. Books are referred to with the following abbreviations:

- LF = *Language Files*
- RH = *The 5 Minute Linguist*
- C = *A Little Book of Language*
- EWEL = *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages*

No.	Date	Topic	In Class	Before Class
1	1/26	Variation and change	Reading RH 7–14, 62–66	
2	2/2	Variation and change	Quiz 1	Read RH 16–19 and LF 416–427
3	2/9	Variation and change	Quiz 2	Read RH 21–28 and 33–36 and C 131–137
	2/16	No class		
	2/23	No class		
4	3/2	Sounds and signs	Quiz 3 — Present group assignment 1	Read C 21–33 and RH 124–127 — Complete group assignment 1
5	3/9	Sounds and signs	Quiz 4	Read LF 42–63

6	3/16	Sounds and signs	Quiz 5	Read RH 102–105 and LF 86–94
7	3/23	Midterm	Midterm	Study!
8	3/30	Language endangerment	Quiz 6	Read RH 107–113, EWEL vii–xvi
	4/6	No class		
9	4/13	Language endangerment	Quiz 7	Read EWEL 1–9
10	4/20	Language endangerment	Quiz 8	Reading will be assigned by group
11	4/27	Words and meaning	Quiz 9 — Present group assignment 2	Read LF 246–256 — Complete group assignment 2
12	5/4	Words and meaning	Quiz 10	Read LF 154–170
13	5/11	Words and meaning	Quiz 11	Read LF 257–265
14	5/18	Final	Final	Study!