

LING 371: Syntax 1

GENERAL INFORMATION

Term: Fall 2026 (Aug 31 – Dec 4, 2026)

Pre-requisite(s): LING 201 Introduction to Linguistics

Schedule: MWF 8:35–9:25 am

Credits: 3

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Samantha Prins, PhD

Email: samantha.prins@mcgill.ca

Office hours: Wednesdays 1:00–2:00 pm, or by appointment

Communication plan: The [myCourses website](#) is the primary venue for course information and updates, which will be posted throughout the semester. Please be sure to check the course website and email regularly. You may also reach the instructor or TA by email or during office hours (please include “LING 371 in the subject line, and allow up to 48 hours for a response on weekdays). For questions about grades and assignments, please contact the TA first.

TEACHING ASSISTANT INFORMATION

Name: George Bennett

Email: george.bennett@mail.mcgill.ca

Office hours: Mondays 3:00–4:00 pm

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course explores pattern and variation in the ways languages organize words into phrases and sentences. Students will consider generative approaches to the study of the sentence as a unit of human language, and will formulate a theory of how the syntax of languages may differ from one another while still mapping onto universal principles of grammar.

McGill catalogue description: Introduction to the study of generative syntax of natural languages, emphasizing basic concepts and formalism: phrase structure rules, transformations, and conditions on rules.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the basic principles of grammar as a computational and symbolic linguistic system.
 - Apply the scientific method to generalize language data, form hypotheses, and test them.
 - Apply comparative methods by examining data from a wide range of languages.
 - Analyze complex sentence structures.
 - Use formal systems to describe syntactic structures.
 - Structure linguistic argumentation in a coherent and convincing way.
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INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

This is an in-person course; attendance is expected at all three weekly meetings, including both lectures and conferences. The midterm and final exams will be scheduled separately (to be announced). Reading and assessments including homework and review quizzes are to be completed outside of class meetings.

Starting in Week 3, conferences will be held on Fridays by the TA (schedule to be announced). In conferences, students will have opportunities to review lecture and reading material and apply the methods developed in class through hands-on practice. Students are responsible for the material covered in conferences just as they are responsible for the material covered in lectures.

Note: You must sign up for your conference section on Minerva. Once you have signed up for one section, you cannot switch to another. Once a section has reached its cap, no more students will be accepted into that section.

Following McGill's guideline that one credit corresponds to approximately 45 hours of student work, a 3-credit course such as this represents about 135 hours of work over the term (roughly 9 hours per week across 15 weeks), including class time, homework, quizzes, and reading. Students who anticipate they cannot take part in certain components of this course should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss accommodations.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Attendance and active participation are required. Participation includes timely completion of assignments and active engagement with lectures, discussions, exercises, and other in-class activities.

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a way that fosters a positive academic experience and does not disrupt the learning environment of others. Classroom communication should follow the principles of civil discourse, guided by curiosity and mutual respect. Diversity of knowledge is an asset to learning, and constructive criticism in discussion of course concepts is encouraged. Mocking and bullying is never allowed.

CLASS RECORDINGS

Class meetings and lectures are not recorded unless by request for accommodation purposes.

COURSE MATERIALS

In this course, students will need access to computer with an internet connection, the myCourses website, the course textbook, a word-processing program, and a reliable method of backing up their work. Course materials (readings, assignments, and supplemental resources) are distributed through the course textbook and the course website.

Textbook: Carnie, Andrew. 2021. *Syntax: A Generative Introduction*, 4th edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

The textbook is available for purchase through the campus bookstore or through the McGill Library. *Note that the [e-book format through the campus library](#) is the 2nd edition.*

Homework assignments are based on exercises in the 4th edition of the textbook—they will also be made available at no cost through the course website. If you are using the McGill library 2nd edition e-book, please be advised that page numbers and content (including exercises) differ somewhat across editions.

COURSE CONTENT & SCHEDULE

The course is organized into weekly units covering generative approaches to syntax, from parts of speech and phrase structure through X-bar theory, theta theory, and syntactic movement. See the schedule below for the

week-by-week sequence, which builds cumulatively from foundational concepts (constituency, phrase structure) to more advanced topics (movement, polysynthesis, etc.).

Reading may be completed at any point during the week it is assigned. Assignments are due on Sundays at 11:59 pm ET unless otherwise noted. *Midterm and final exam schedules are to be announced.*

WEEK	SCHEDULE	TOPIC	READING	ASSIGNMENTS	DUE
1	Aug 31–Sept 4	Generative Grammar	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 1	—	—
2	Sept 9–11: classes W/F only (Labour Day)	Parts of Speech	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 2	Review Quiz 1	Sunday Sept 13
3	Sept 14–18	Constituency & Phrase Structure	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 3	Homework 1	Sunday Sept 20
4	Sept 21–25	Structural Relations	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 4	Review Quiz 2	Sunday Sept 27
5	Sept 28–Oct 2	Binding Theory	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 5	Homework 2	Sunday Oct 4
6	Oct 7: class W only (Election Day, Fall Reading Break)	TBA	TBA	—	—
7	Oct 16: class F only (Fall Reading Break)	Review	—	Midterm Exam	TBA
8	Oct 19–23	X-bar Theory	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 6	—	—
9	Oct 26–30	Extending X-bar: Functional Heads	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 7	Review Quiz 3	Sunday Nov 1
10	Nov 2–6	Constraining X-bar: Theta Theory	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 8	Homework 3	Sunday Nov 8
11	Nov 9–13	Head-to-Head Movement	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 10	Review Quiz 4	Sunday Nov 15
12	Nov 16–20	DP movement	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 11	Homework 4	Sunday Nov 22
13	Nov 23–27	<i>Wh</i> - Movement & Locality	<i>Syntax</i> Ch. 12	—	—
14	Nov 30–Dec 4: classes M/W/Th/F (Makeup Day Dec 3)	Special topic(s) TBA Review & Wrap-up	TBA	—	—
—	Fall 2026 exam period Dec 7–22 (Final exam schedule TBA)	—	—	Final Exam	TBA

Note: The course schedule is tentative and subject to change with reasonable notice to students.

ASSESSMENT & ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

Assessment in this course is based on homework, review quizzes, and exams. Homework focuses primarily on the analysis of syntactic phenomena in linguistic problem sets. Review quizzes cover broader course concepts, terminology, and formalism. The midterm and final exam incorporate both course concepts and problem sets.

Grades are calculated automatically as a weighted average of homework, quiz, and exam scores. For both homework and quizzes, the single lowest score in each category is automatically dropped.

CATEGORY	DUE DATES	% OF FINAL GRADE
Homework (one attempt, lowest score dropped)	Sundays by 11:59 pm (see above for specific dates)	40%
Review Quizzes (unlimited attempts, lowest score dropped)	Sundays by 11:59 pm (see above for specific dates)	20%
Exams (one midterm + one final)	TBA	40%

Homework and review quizzes must be submitted through the course website by the stated deadlines. Completed homework must be submitted as a PDF document; any hand-drawn trees should be clearly scanned and inserted in-line. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due Sundays at 11:59 pm ET.

Midterm and final exams will be completed and submitted in-person on scheduled exam dates (TBA).

MCGILL POLICY STATEMENTS

LANGUAGE OF SUBMISSION

“In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Students' Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.” (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009) / « Conformément à la [Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue. » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 21 janvier 2009)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)” (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See [McGill's guide to academic integrity](#) for more information). / « L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon [le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et procédures disciplinaires](#). » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 29 janvier 2003) (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté intellectuelle de McGill](#).)

RESPECT

The University is committed to maintaining teaching and learning spaces that are respectful and inclusive for all; offensive, violent, or harmful language arising in course contexts is subject to disciplinary action.

ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT & ACCOMMODATIONS

As the instructor of this course, my goal is to foster an inclusive and accessible learning environment. This course affirms people of all linguistic, cultural, regional, religious, ethnic and gender identities and expressions. Please let me know (by email, during office hours, or by appointment) if you would like me to refer to you by a name or pronouns different from those in your student record.

If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#).

COLLABORATION

Students are encouraged to work together to review material and practice exercises; however, assignments must be written up and submitted individually. Students who collaborate on homework must list the names of collaborators at the top of the submission.

ABSENCES & LATE WORK

Students may miss up to three class meetings without penalty; additional unexcused absences will affect the participation grade. Students experiencing extenuating circumstances that prevent attendance for an extended period should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Late work is not accepted, except for in limited circumstances (e.g., excused absences) arranged with the instructor in advance. Students facing extenuating circumstances that prevent timely submission should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Use of generative AI is acceptable only as a study tool for reviewing course concepts, identifying relevant literature for further reading, etc. It is not appropriate for the completion of homework and quizzes; uncited use of AI-generated content will be treated as plagiarism under the [Code of Student Conduct](#).

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

Best practice is to back up your work regularly and submit assignments with time to spare ahead of the deadline when possible. If you encounter an issue with the course website, report it to IT Support, then email the instructor as soon as possible so alternative submission arrangements can be made.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY & COPYRIGHT

I ask for everyone's cooperation in ensuring that course materials are not reproduced or placed in the public domain. Students may use these materials for their own academic purposes, but may not distribute them by posting online or otherwise circulating materials to others who may copy and share them.

© Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, quiz questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or medium without the instructor's explicit permission.

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Information in this course outline, other than the grading and assessment policies, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

STUDENT RESOURCES

CHARTER OF STUDENTS' RIGHTS

Charter of Students' Rights: Additional policies governing academic issues that affect students can be found in the [McGill Charter of Students' Rights](#).

BASIC NEEDS

If you have difficulty affording food or if you lack a safe and stable place to live, and believe that these circumstances may affect your performance in this course, I encourage you to contact the Dean of Students, who can connect you with support services. If you feel comfortable doing so, please let me know as well so we can discuss how I can best support your learning.

LEARNING SUPPORT RESOURCES & WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Consult [learning resources](#) on topics such as time management, study strategies, group work, exam prep, and more. For further individualized support, check out the programs and resources offered by [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#). If you are feeling overwhelmed by your academic work and/or would like to further develop your time and workload management skills, don't hesitate to seek support from [Student Services](#).

WELLNESS

Many students face challenges that can affect their academic success and wellbeing. Please reach out for support when you need it — wellness resources are available through the McGill Wellness Hub, on campus, off campus, and online.

PEER SUPPORT SERVICES

If you wish to talk with another student for support with any part of your experience at McGill, you can reach out to services such as the [Peer Support Centre at McGill](#), [McGill Students' Nightline](#), or the [Eating Disorder Centre of SSMU](#), as appropriate. All provide confidential, non-judgemental, active listening-based peer conversations, and non-professional support and referrals/resources as needed.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESPONSE, SUPPORT, AND EDUCATION

The Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (OSVRSE) offers confidential and non-judgmental services, receives and coordinates responses to situations of sexual and gender-based violence, and works to prevent sexual violence through education and awareness raising. You can access OSVRSE services even if you don't formally report an experience.

REPORTING HARASSMENT OR DISCRIMINATION

The Office for Mediation and Reporting (OMR) offers online and in-person confidential consultations for any student seeking to report harassment, discrimination, or sexual violence, and also conducts mediation and investigations.
