

COMS 411: Disability, Technology, Communication

Professor Jonathan Sterne

Winter 2023 | Mondays 14:35-17:25

W220 Arts¹



Prof: jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca (he/they) <https://sterneworks.org>

You can call me Jonathan or Professor Sterne, as you prefer. Ask me about titles in the first class if you want to know more or aren't sure what to do. Please tell me what you would like to be called.

Office Location: W280 or Zoom at

Office Hours: By appointment. You can book a slot here:

Seminar Description

This course explores the intersections of disability and media studies in order to rethink our basic concepts of communication, technology and culture, as well as to advance our understandings of disability and the technocultural environments in which it exists. We will consider critical accounts of disability against theories of technology and communication. Through readings, discussions, and student research, we will develop

¹ McGill University is named for James McGill who enslaved Black and Indigenous people. Learn more here at https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations_and_Report.pdf (pp. 55-67). McGill is situated on unceded Indigenous lands in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal). The Kaniien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are recognized as the traditional custodians of these lands and waters. Zoom's headquarters are located on Muwekma Ohlone territory. Desire2Learn's headquarters are located on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie. The actual servers we will be using may or may not be located in Quebec, but are very likely to benefit from water rights expropriated from Indigenous peoples.

scholarship that provides alternatives to the idealized norms of able-bodiedness that pervade the humanities and social sciences.

Goals

At the end of the term students should be able to:

1. define and explain different perspectives on disability;
2. ask interesting and deep questions about disability, technology, and culture;
3. identify and analyze ableist dimensions of existing environments and technologies;
4. imagine and design less ableist scenarios for those environments and technologies;
5. describe how a focus on disability transforms the study and analysis of other topics such as communication, culture, or other axes of social justice;
6. leave the course more precise, confident, and skilled in your thinking and scholarly practice than when you went in.

Delivery Plan

Class sessions: COMS 411 is a student-driven, discussion-intensive seminar. The first meeting of the term has more lecturing, but after that, it is a mix of discussion, mini-lectures, group analysis of media materials, exploratory exercises, and twice during the term, a “book club” where we teach one another the contents of a book. Large group discussions will follow a speakers’ list to prevent interruptions, and people will say “and that’s my thought” or “and that’s my question” to indicate they have finished talking.

As of today and per McGill regulations, the course will be in person. On the first day we will discuss access policies.

Covid: I am immunocompromised. Therefore, I will be teaching in a mask. I will provide you with procedural masks throughout the term. I ask that you wear them and not take them off to speak. (Though of course you can have a drink of water or whatever). If people do not wear masks, I will conduct class with the windows up and we’ll wear our coats.

The Course Website: We will use McGill’s MyCourses system.

Class Credos

Special disability studies credos:

Nothing about us without us: to understand disability is to understand the perspectives of people with disabilities.

Our classroom is a disability-forward space: differences are the norm, not the exception. We will learn with and from disability. But disability encompasses many different things, some of them contradictory.

My usual credos:

More than one thing can be true: cultural analysis only works if it is possible to hold onto apparently contradictory ideas at once, and explain how they can both be true in specific circumstances.

No bullshit:² we will avoid easy, prepackaged explanations of complex phenomena, and we will greet the claims of interested parties as open to interpretation and analysis. We will also not bullshit one another.

You have the right to be wrong: part of learning is changing one's own perspective. This is only possible where ideas can be expressed and challenged, and people are allowed to change their minds. But: no "devil's advocates" will be allowed (see: "no bullshit").

It is everyone's job to imagine a better world: any critique of how something is raises the question of how it ought to be. You will be asked to think carefully and imaginatively about alternatives to the way things are.

Follow the golden rule: treat others as you would want to be treated.

Course Requirements

Work for Evaluation (and % of Semester Grade):

I. Weekly Annotations (5% – pass/fail per annotation)

Each week you will annotate a reading using the program Perusall in MyCourses. Specifically, you will comment upon and ask questions about a reading, directly on the PDF text itself. You can also respond to each other's annotated comments and questions on the text. We will be able to see each other's annotations, to help foster collective reading and catalyze a forum for discussion. Students will annotate the same files. Each week two readings will be assigned for annotation. You can choose to annotate one or both as you see fit.

All class members should be prepared to say something about what they wrote in their annotations. I will use annotations as part of my weekly class prep to call people into discussion.

Annotations will be graded pass/fail (1 or 0). To earn a 1, the annotation must be completed, and it must offer constructive comments, feedback and questions that will help foster discussion. A 0 indicates the annotation was not completed OR that the comments, feedback and questions were obstructive, disruptive, or were otherwise not

² Yes, sometimes it's ok to swear (and use contractions) in formal writing. But you have to level up first.

conducive to constructive discussion and debate. Students should make at minimum 3 substantial comments per week.

Some examples of ideas for good annotations:

- a passage that made you think and that you'd like to discuss with others.
- a passage you didn't understand and would like explained
- an explanation of a passage in response to a classmate's question
- a reaction to a passage that you'd like to share.
- please avoid "seek-and-destroy" comments. I don't expect everyone to agree with every reading, but I do expect everyone to engage with them constructively.
- as the term goes on, I encourage you to draw connections between different readings, weeks, and themes.
- I encourage you to read one another's comments before class.

Annotations should be posted to the MyCourses site by 9am Montreal time each Monday of class.

Annotations are NOT due when a project is due or when there is a book club.

II. The Textures of Disability Project (30% – letter grade)

For 6 February, you will write a 4-5 page (+/-) double-spaced paper (plus scholarly apparatus). **You will have an automatic penalty-free extension to end-of-day 10 February to revise your paper after class, should you want to.** Alternatively, you may produce a video, podcast, Infographic, or other multimodal text.

This paper is an opportunity to expand upon one of your discussion posts, or to dive deeper into issues around defining disability. Pick one quote, concept, or idea about disability from the readings thus far that you found particularly interesting. Then, choose another reading, and put the two authors in dialogue with one another. Pick a quote from the second reading that relates to the quote from the first reading. Do the authors disagree? Does one expand or contest the other's idea?

Here's an easy way to imagine the paper: the two authors meet up for coffee to talk about one of their articles. What do they discuss, where do they agree or disagree?

I am open to other proposals, but the idea of this assignment is for you to think more deeply about the difficulties in outlining and defining a concept of disability.

For class on 6 February, we will discuss your papers in small groups, then in large group.

III. The Going Out/Staying In Project (30% – letter grade)

For 13 March, 5pm, you will write a 4-5 page (+/-) double-spaced paper (plus scholarly apparatus). **You will have an automatic extension to 17 March to revise your paper after class, should you want to.** Alternatively, you may produce a video, podcast, Infographic, or other multimodal text.

You will apply a concept from one of our readings by planning an accessible outing in Montreal, from start to finish. Since we are *still* in Covid, that “outing” might actually involve staying in, rather than going out, but it should be an event.

The event can be for any configuration of abilities, subject positions, or number of people: the important thing is that you think through accessibility in terms of getting around the city and engaging with its cultural life. You may work alone or with a partner. It could be conceived of as a date, or as a trip to work, or as some other kind of social or cultural event.

You will informally present your projects in 5-minute videos or live presentations due at class time on **13 March**; **we will watch them together and then do a Q&A.**

We will discuss this project in class. It is usually a big hit with the students.

IV. The Dismedia Project (30% – letter grade)

For 12 April, 5pm, you will write a 4-5 page (+/-) double-spaced paper (plus scholarly apparatus). **You will have an automatic extension to end-of-day 17 April to revise your paper after class, should you want to.** Alternatively, you may produce a video, podcast, Infographic, or other multimodal text.

This is like the Going Out/Staying In Project, but this time focusing on making a media situation more accessible.

You will apply a concept from one of the readings to reimagine a media technology or media practice in a more accessible fashion. The technology or practice can be for any configuration of abilities, subject positions, or interests: the important thing is you think about how accessibility can and cannot work with a given media technology or practice. You may work alone or with a partner.

You will informally present your projects in 5-minute videos or live presentations due at class time on **12 April**; **we will watch them together and then do a Q&A.**

V. The Portfolio (5% – pass/fail)

At the end of the term, you will look back on your projects. **For 18 April, 5pm**, you will write an informal essay assessing your projects. You can write in the form of a letter to

me or a letter to someone else. Other formats are also welcome. You should answer the following questions:

1. What did you learn doing the various assignments for this course?
2. What are your goals for working with or thinking about disability going forward, after this course is over?
3. You may also revise one or more of your prior projects and resubmit them: for each project, you must submit a cover letter explaining what you changed along with the revised project.

Class Schedule

For most students, I recommend reading ink-print (i.e., printing out your readings). But some students need multimodal (voice to text and reading) or other approaches. I'll say more on the first day.

This schedule is subject to change and our first-day discussion. Changes to the schedule will be announced in class and on the course website.

9 Jan: Basic Concepts and the Current Conjuncture

Recommended:

Sins Invalid "What Is Disability Justice?" <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/news-1/2020/6/16/what-is-disability-justice>

Berne, Patricia, Aurora Levins Morales, David Langstaff, and Sins Invalid. "Ten Principles of Disability Justice." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1–2 (2018): 227–30. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wsqa.2018.0003>.

"Autistic Hoya's Brief Abled Privilege Checklist" (2016):

<https://autistichoya.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/brief-abled-privilege-checklist-mar-2016.pdf>

Shew, Ashley "Let Covid-19 Expand Awareness of Disability Tech," *Nature* 581 (7 May 2020): 9: <https://media.nature.com/original/magazine-assets/d41586-020-01312-w/d41586-020-01312-w.pdf>.

16 Jan: Disability as Contingent; Living in the Shadows of Eugenics and Statistics

For the first two weeks of class, I'm giving a slightly heavier reading load to get things up and running. Schalk is brand new and gives an account of Black disability politics from the perspective of activists working in the Harriet Tubman collective; Piepzn-Samarasinha is a major writer in the disability justice movement, and this is their latest formulation of disability politics; Kafer is a standard text in the field and will introduce critiques of the medical model—this may be a good first reading for people new to the field; Appleman shows how eugenic ideas inform public health practice and policy, and it's not a happy reading. Recommended readings are more standard texts: Siebers' "ideology of ability" shaped some of my thinking on disability and Davis shows how sign language was a normal part of Indigenous intercultural communication, suggesting alternative ways of thinking about disability.

Schalk, Sami. "Black Disability Politics Now." *Black Disability Politics*, 140-55. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah-Lahkshmi. "Writing a Disabled Future, in Progress." *The Future is Disabled*, 1-22 (web version). Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2022.

Kafer, Alison. "Introduction: Imagined Futures." *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 1-24. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.

Appleman, Laura "Hiding in Plain Sight: Public Health, Eugenics, and Covid-19," *HPRH* 30 (2021): <https://hphr.org/30-article-appleman/>

Recommended:

Siebers, Tobin. "Introduction." *Disability Theory*, 1-33. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.

Davis, Jeffrey. "North American Indian Sign Language," *Sign Languages of the World: A Comparative Handbook*, ed. Julie Baaken Jepsen et al., 911-931. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

23 Jan: Subjects of Ability and Disability

This week is about who "counts" as disabled, focusing on the historic exclusions of intellectual disability and racialized disability. Yergeau offers a truly autistic theory of autism (watch out for shit jokes and ELO references); Hamraie is also a standard text and explains how a "normal" body shapes the physical and built environment; Puar introduces the idea of debility and critiques who "counts" as disabled; and Rose offers a history of disability rooted in capitalism and labour. In the recommended readings, Bell searches for disability in Black history; Bérubé asks what it means to incorporate disability into citizenship.

Yergeau, M. Remy. "Introduction: Involution." *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*, 1-34. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

Hamraie, Aimi. "Normate Template: Knowing-Making the Architectural Inhabitant." *Building Access: Universal Access and the Politics of Disability*, 19-39. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Puar, Jasbir. "Preface: Hands up, Don't Shoot!" *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, ix-xxiv. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Rose, Sarah F. "Introduction." *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s-1930s*, 1-13. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Recommended:

Bell, Chris. "Doing Representational Detective Work." *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions*, ed. Chris Bell, 1-4. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012.

Bérubé, Michael. "Disability and Citizenship." *Dissent*, Spring 2003.

30 Jan: Borders of Disability: Coming Out, Chronic Illness, Biocertification

This week I had trouble deciding how to order the readings. Together Lazard and Samuels discuss the politics of coming out for people with invisible disabilities. Lazard tells their own story and difficulties with the medical paradigm, while Samuels connects the politics of passing with the history of racial passing. In the recommended readings, Wendell discusses the lines that cross and separate disability and chronic illness; Samuels discusses biocertification and the need to prove disability; and Mazza and Ellis discuss the difficulties of getting accommodations.

Lazard, Carolyn. "How to Be a Person in the Age of Autoimmunity."

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55c40d69e4b0a45eb985d566/t/58cebc9dc534a59fbd98c2/1489943709737/Howtobeapersonintheageofautoimmunity+%281%29.pdf>.

Samuels, Ellen. "My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming Out Discourse." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9:1 (2003): 233-255.

Wendell, Susan. "Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities." *Hypatia* 16:4 (2001): 17-33.

Recommended:

Samuels, Ellen. "Proving Disability," *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*, 121-140. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

Mazza, Angelina and Kate Ellis. "'It Shouldn't Be This Hard to Be Accommodated': Students Discuss Barriers to Accessing McGill's Office for Students With Disabilities," *McGill Daily* (26 Nov 2020):

<https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2020/11/it-shouldnt-be-this-hard-to-be-accommodated/>.

6 Feb: Textures of disability presentations. Please post a draft of your Textures paper on MyCourses instead of a response paper. Revised textures paper due end of day 10 Feb on MyCourses.

13 Feb: Book Club! (Disability and Design)

You will make a short presentation or video for this class; no response paper is due.

Hendren explores the relationship between disability and the built environment. She wrote this as a trade book so it's a bit of a different read, but it's a synthesis of materials not available in one package elsewhere and offers a unique survey of different kinds of relationships between disability, technology, and the built environment.

Hendren, Sara. *What Can a Body Do?: How We Meet the Built World*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2020.

Everyone will read the intro "Who is the Built World Built For?" and the Epilogue "Making Assistance Visible." Then, 5 groups will be convened and assigned to explain each of the other chapters of the book. Instead of annotations, this week

each group will produce a video of approximately 5 minutes that explains their assigned chapter by answering the following questions in plain language:

- what is the chapter's argument?
- what are key quotes and examples?
- how does it fit into the book overall?
- anything else we should know?

We'll watch the presentations together, and then we'll have a discussion of the book

Recommended:

Williamson, Bess. "Berkeley, California: An Independent Style of Access." *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design*, 96-128. New York: NYU Press, 2019.

20 Feb: Beyond Access, or "Why Aren't"³ Disabled People Out in Public?

This week continues the theme of environments and access, looking beyond the concept of "access" to consider other potential disabled relationships to the environment. Kim and Schalk apply Audre Lorde's concept of "self care" to a disability context; Fleet discusses a blind relationship to the built environment; Schweik explains the history of the ugly laws, which aimed to ban disabled people from public environments. In the recommended column, Dolmage explains how disability was combined with race to curb immigration.

Kim, Jina B. and Sami Schalk. "Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care: A Crip of Color Critique." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120:2 (2021): 325-342.

Fleet, Chancy. "Accessibility, Augmented" *Urban Omnibus* (6 Nov 2019):

<https://urbanomnibus.net/2019/11/accessibility-augmented/>.

Schweik, Susan. "Introduction." In *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*. New York: New York University Press, 2009, 1-20.

Recommended:

Dolmage, Jay. "Canada's Pier 21 and the Memorialization of Immigration." In *Disabled Upon Arrival: Eugenics, Immigration and the Construction of Race and Disability*, 51-71. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018.

27 Feb: Reading Week. Post a picture of a palm tree in the discussion forum.

You are not expected to work on this course during reading week.

6 March: Bodies, Spaces, Technologies

Hilton discusses the racial politics of autistic wandering and the costs of surveillance; Dokumaci talked about disabled ways of inhabiting space; Pullin and Cook ask what technologies for speech should do; In the recommended readings, Wong offers a crip

³ We actually are.

perspective on plastic straw bans; Mills explains how politics get built into cochlear implants.

Hilton, Leon J. "Avonte's Law: Autism, Wandering, and the Racial Surveillance of Neurological Difference." *African American Review* 50, no. 2 (July 21, 2017): 221–35.

Dokumaci, Arseli. "Introduction: Arseli's Story." In *Activist Affordances: How Disabled People Improve More Habitable Worlds*, 1-27. Durham: Duke University Press, 2023 (That's right! 2023! Rrrriipped from the headlines!)

Pullin, Graham and Andrew Cook. "Six Speaking Chairs (not directly) for People Who Cannot Speak," *ACM Interactions* 17:5 (2010): 38-42.

Recommended:

Wong, Alice. "The Rise and Fall of the Plastic Straw: Sucking in Crip Defiance." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

Mills, Mara. "Do Signals Have Politics?: Inscribing Abilities in Cochlear Implants." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, edited by Karin Bijsterveld and Trevor Pinch. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

13 March: Going Out/Staying In Project. You will also make a short video or 5-minute presentation for this meeting. No response paper is due, but please post a 5-page draft of your paper on MyCourses. Revised written project due end of day on 17 March.

20 March: TBA

27 March: Shifting Sense Modalities

Kleege introduces and critiques audiodescription in film and television; Zdenek offer an analytical approach for thinking about captioning; Slater gives a how-to for audiodescription and a primer on blind media consumption; Gotkin gives the history of the Deaf Club as an alternative model of disability access in public. In the recommended readings, Ellcessor discusses accessibility beyond simple compliance; Kleege explores how audiodescription could handle art; and Greg Downey offers a history of (resistance to) closed captioning for television.

Kleege, Georgina. "Audiodescription Described," *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Zdenek, Sean. "A Rhetorical View of Captioning." In *Reading Sounds: Closed-Captioned Media and Popular Culture*, 1-32. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Slater, Andy. "Describing Your Image: Accessibility for Blind and Low Vision Audiences." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKz9rSo04sw> (12:39 long)

Gotkin, Kevin. "Crip Club Vibes: Technologies for a New Nightlife" *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–7.

Recommended:

Ellcessor, Elizabeth and Aimi Hamraie, "Technology with Liz Ellcessor," *Contra* Podcast* Episode 29 (2020):

<https://www.mapping-access.com/podcast/2020/5/11/contra-podcast-episode-29-contratechnology-with-liz-ellcessor> (you can read or listen as you prefer).

Kleege, Georgina. "What They Talk About When They Talk About Art," *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Downey, Greg. "Captioning Television for the Deaf Population," *Closed Captioning: Subtitling, Stenography, and the Convergence of Text with Television*, 53-102. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

3 April: Intimacy, Refusal, Abandonment

Friedner considers the politics of maintenance and repair for cochlear implants; Alexander considers the problem of surveillance from the standpoint of medical technologies; Clark offers a critical deaf-blind perspective on accessible media; Mingus explains what it feels like to be truly accommodated. In the recommended readings, Bennett discusses some of the challenges of disability for interaction designers;

Friedner, Michele. "(Non)-Use: Maintaining Devices, Relationships, and Senses." In *Sensory Futures: Deafness and Cochlear Implant Infrastructures in India*, 125-156. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022.

Alexander, Neta. "Our Bodies, Ourselves" *Real Life Magazine* (1 August 2019): <https://reallifemag.com/our-bodies-ourselves/>.

Clark, John Lee. "Against Access." *McSweeney's 64: The Audio Issue* (2021): https://audio.mcsweeneys.net/transcripts/against_access.html.

Mingus, Mia. "Access Intimacy." <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/> *Leaving Evidence*, 5 May 2011.

Recommended:

"Design, Disability, Creativity, and Access: An Interview with Cynthia Bennett," *The Radical AI Podcast* <https://www.radicalai.org/cynthia-bennett> (about 60 minutes).

12 April (Wednesday is the new Monday!): You will also make a short video or 5-minute presentation for this meeting; 5-page Dismedia draft is due. Revised Dismedia paper due end of day 17 April on MyCourses.

Course Policies

Access Needs/Accommodation: I study disability, have disabilities, and believe firmly in the right to access. Just come talk with me at the beginning of term, or send me an email, and we will figure out what works for you and for the class. I only ask that you be forthright and clear with me from the beginning to avoid surprises later in the term. You

do not need any kind of medical documentation (what we call “biocertification” in disability studies) in order to seek accommodation. You also do not need to contact the Office for Student Accessibility and Achievement in order to ask for an accommodation, though you are certainly welcome to work with them if you are so inclined. I work with them all the time for my undergrad classes. The SAA can be reached at 514-398-6009 (voice), access.achieve@mcgill.ca (email) <https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/> (web).

The above commitment to accommodate applies equally to survivors of sexual assault and/or harassment on or off campus. Survivors are encouraged to consult the resources provided by the Students’ Society of McGill University (<https://ssmu.ca/resources/sexual-violence/>), the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students’ Society (<http://www.sacomss.org/wp/>) and the McGill Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/>).

Universal/Resonant Design: My courses are intentionally designed to be modular and flexible and to address different learning styles and needs. Nevertheless, aspects of this syllabus—requirements, expectations, etc.—may conflict with your access needs. I can be flexible if you come to me within the first two weeks of class to discuss your access needs. Note that some accommodation requests could potentially conflict with *others’* access needs (or mine), and/or the pedagogical goals of the course, in which case they might need to be negotiated.

Etiquette:

1. I expect you to really **try**.
2. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstances. There will be a strict limit on seek-and-destroy hermeneutics. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.
3. Your job as a participant is to listen actively to what others have to say and advance the discussion. **If you are a confident contributor**, use your confidence for good and not evil. Help bring others into discussion, refer to your classmates by name, and be encouraging about the contributions of those who do not say as much.
4. While personal anecdotes are allowed, keep in mind this is a seminar. Others may disagree with your interpretation of your experience. This is encouraged and allowed. If you are not comfortable with this, do not share your story. If you share your story and *then* decide you are uncomfortable with others discussing it, just ask us to stop and I will move the discussion along.

5. **Awkward Silences** and hesitation are okay. Don't feel you need to rush to speak and don't worry if you need a little time to articulate something. Contributing to class discussion is more than the frequency of the times your hand goes up and the number of words you say. If you are struggling to articulate something, that's probably a sign that you are saying something that is new and not obvious.

6. **Difficult subject matter:** As your prof, I will never do anything intentionally to shock or traumatize students. At the same time, it's our job to discuss difficult subjects in class, and nobody can predict the effect some materials may have on someone. I will try and give previews of the kinds of subject matter you will encounter before you encounter it but I cannot guarantee I will preview the important thing. If I forget, feel free to ask. If you are having difficulty dealing with a class discussion or a reading or recording, you may raise the issue as part of the discussion (keeping in mind #4 above), or you may simply discretely leave class. A note to me (the prof) would be helpful after the fact so that we know what happened and don't think you just got up and left.

Technology Policy: We will discuss a technology policy on the first day of class.

Pre-Covid, my technology policy stated that I would like to avoid an atmosphere of "ambient computing" and "availability to apps and social media." Even though people are now forced to use their computers a lot more, I still want to establish the same baseline: the classroom should be a space of focused discussion, a place to come together. Please try to resist multitasking. If you need to look something up (for the class discussion, not a dinner recipe), please do so quickly and then close that window.

Grades: I am eager to help you do well on assignments before they are due. Please visit me during office hours to ask questions about material for the course and assignments on which you are working.

I evaluate in terms of letter grades, and then assign them numbers in terms of the baselines on the scale set out in the Arts and Sciences calendar (85=A, 70=B, etc), which allows them to be properly weighted and averaged.

Grades in the "B" range are awarded for work that meets the requirements of the assignment. The B is a baseline for students who complete satisfactory work. B and may have some small issues or mistakes, but nothing significant.

Grades in the "A" range are awarded only for superior work that goes above and beyond the assignment to deal with substantial intellectual issues related to the assignment, while also doing everything else well. Particularly original or beautiful projects may also be marked up, but they must fulfill the requirements of the assignment.

Grades in the "C" range are awarded for work that meets *some* (but not all) of the requirements of the assignment sufficiently, or has a major shortcoming in one area.

Grades in the “D” and “F” range reflect unsatisfactory work. You can always check your grades on MyCourses.

While life does happen, excessive absences that are not discussed with me ahead of time could result in a reduction of your final grade if you have not compensated for it in your course contributions. There are no “excused” or “unexcused” absences, and you never need to show me a doctor’s note. You just need to get in touch with me before the last minute (see: “no bullshit” above).

Late Work: Reading notes received after class receive half credit. Their purpose is to help you, me, and everyone else prepare for class. The three major assignments can be turned in late if you get in touch with me ahead of time, but keep in mind that certain class times are set aside for presentations, and other class times are not.

French: You have the right to submit your written work in French. If you plan to write in French, please let me know. I’m also not good enough at French to give you feedback on style, but I can read for comprehension.

Class discussions are in English, but you’re certainly welcome to resort to French if you can’t find the right word in English and we’ll figure it out together.

Nondiscrimination: I value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. I will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, appearance, size, personal difference or the use of assistive technology in negotiating that difference. Among other things, this means that you do not have to agree with your teacher, the assigned readings, or the majority of your classmates in order to do well in this course. You are, however, obligated to demonstrate an understanding of the course material *whether or not you agree with it*. If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know.

You must complete all the major assignments to pass the course. It is your responsibility to make sure I receive any assignment you turn in. It is also your responsibility to properly back up your work: keep more than one digital copy and always have a paper copy of anything you submit.

Required Academic Integrity Statement: 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 (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity)

Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control [HAHAHAHAHAHA WHAT WOULD THAT

LOOK LIKE CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE SUCH A THING?!?!?!], the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

I am keenly aware that I am still teaching in the middle of a global pandemic and that many of us could find ourselves in difficult situations beyond our control during the semester. Please do not hesitate to contact me if anything happens that makes learning and engaging difficult for you. The sooner, the better.

I also strongly recommend that you make 1-2 buddies early in the term whom you can text if you miss an entire class meeting, or need help from a peer on something. To facilitate this buddy-making process, I will create some arbitrary “pods” for you to join and use them a couple times for class discussion.

Thanks! Carrie Rentschler (from whom I stole the annotation assignment), Mara Mills, and many others.