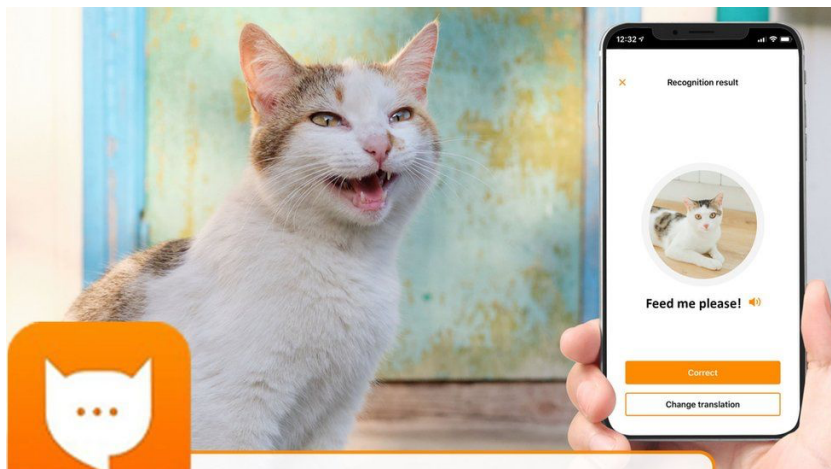


COMS 611: Critical Perspectives on Machine Listening

Professor Jonathan Sterne

Winter 2024 | Wednesdays 14:30-17:30

Arts W220¹



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

You can call me Jonathan, or Professor Sterne. Ask me about titles and institutional hierarchies on the first day of class if you want to know more. Please tell me what you would like to be called.

Office Location: W280 or Zoom at <https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/7750306572/> / <https://mcgill.zoom.us/my/jsoffice> (it's the same link). Password: kittens

Office Hours: on the first day, we'll decide whether my weekly office hour will be right before or right after class. You can just drop in. If that doesn't work, email me for an advance appointment (but give me time—last minute rarely works).

Seminar Description

Machine learning—often branded as artificial intelligence or “AI”— is an ever-expanding set of political and technological operations in our world today. The last few years have seen an

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 Kanien'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.

explosion in critical scholarship on AI, as well as a flowering of critiques within industry, in popular media, and among artists. While the first round of that work focused primarily on the processing of images and text, there is growing interest in the relationship between AI and sound, especially as it relates to speech, music, and environmental sound.

Our seminar will consider this intersection in depth. We will read and discuss some of the new critical scholarship on AI in media studies and related fields, and then turn our attention to the politics of machine listening, which are AI systems that process sound. We will focus on actually-existing sonic AI systems rather than prognostications. We will use the tools of sound studies, media studies, science and technology studies and related fields from the humanities and interpretive social sciences to demystify the technology; and to produce sharp, precise, and politicized analyses of technological practices. How is AI like other kinds of computational cultural practices, and how is it different? How does AI relate to automation more generally? Does it raise genuinely new political or ethical questions, or is it just an extension of already existing antagonisms shaped by capitalism, racism, sexism, ableism, colonialism and other axes of power? Along the way, we will critically consider the work of corporations and researchers alongside that of artists, activists, and others who seek to build technology for people rather than for profit.

This course is connected with the international symposium “Machine Listening: Critical Perspectives” that will take place 4-6 April 2024 at McGill University. Students will attend the conference, interview the participants for publication on <https://machinelisting.exposed>, and have priority access to all the events (free meals! a party!). After the conference, we’ll spend a class on a debrief.

The reading load will be approximately three essays per week (or the equivalent), and the seminar will be discussion driven, with some lecturing. Students will leave the course with a better understanding of how to study emerging technologies, current work in media studies and science and technology studies, as well as improved skills in interviewing, research, writing, conferencing, and revising.

Goals: at the end of the term I would like you be able to:

1. describe AI systems from different perspectives (technical, phenomenological, ethnographic, interfacial, historical);
2. ask interesting questions about artificial intelligence and culture;
3. recognize and be able to summarize some of the key arguments in critical AI studies;
4. describe how a focus on sound does, or does not, transform how we study AI;
5. improve and practice your interviewing skills;
6. help guide the critical discourse on sound and AI through interviewing current practitioners and writing about it;
7. develop a sense for how to study emerging technologies, whatever they are; and
8. leave the course a little more precise, confident, and skilled in your thinking and scholarly practice than when you went in.

Delivery Plan

Class sessions: We will meet in person in W220 Arts. There will be a break in the middle of each 3-hour seminar. I want the classroom to be welcoming, as well as serious and challenging. I will say more about this on the first day.

During class, we will use a number of strategies for helping discussion in a large seminar: small group work on collective google docs (class catuments²), creative exercises, short lectures and informal student presentations/responses. No formal presentations will be required.

The Course Website: We will be using McGill's MyCourses system (a branded version of D2L).

Class 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 all be true in specific circumstances. Understanding contradiction is the core of cultural studies.

No bullshit: 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. That said, you will have many opportunities to brainstorm and make things up. That kind of activity is strongly encouraged, and is not bullshit even if bullshitting may be involved.

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.

And three special graduate-level credos:

Precision, precision, precision: humanists value precision in the use of language. We should be precise and intentional even when we are being ambiguous.

Make your own problems: don't accept prepackaged, mechanistic, individualistic, or psychologistic explanations for complex cultural phenomena. Break with common sense. Our job as scholars is to frame new questions and objects of study, and then go about researching them.

Be patient with yourself and with others: at our best, we are all beginners. No question is too basic to ask in a discussion.

Requirements:

² Term coined by Emily Dolan for our co-taught Instruments and Instrumentalities Seminars.

I. Contribution to the course (25%)

The purpose of this mark is that we all have a responsibility to make sure the course goes well for ourselves, and for everyone else. There are many ways to contribute to the course.

Weekly Reading Commentary in Perusall:

Due 12pm on Tuesday each week before class.

These are designed so that I can read them and set up a discussion agenda for class. A nice side-effect is that everyone will be ready with at least one comment that they've had time to mull over beforehand.

If you find this format constraining, you are welcome to write more afterwards, for instance, if you have a reaction or you want to develop an idea in the more standard "weekly response paper format." (I often write to think.)

You are allowed one (1) "seek and destroy hermeneutic" per semester in writing OR discussion. Use yours wisely and we will cheer you on.

What if I miss a week? You can miss 1 week no problem, no excuse necessary. But this assignment is designed to help me prepare for class (yes, your writing helps me), so there is no point in submitting work if it's so late that it's after class. If you find you cannot keep up with this assignment, please contact me right away so we can work out another way for you to contribute to the course.

What if I'm not comfortable discussing what I wrote in class? That's a bummer – I want you to be comfortable discussing your ideas, even when they are not fully formed. But if you are really uncomfortable, let me know and I won't call on you.

A productivity hack: You can do this assignment after having done one of the readings for the week, should find yourself doing the others last-minute.

Special Weeks

We will do different things on book club weeks.

Participation in class

Showing up, paying attention in class, and contributing to discussion is the default mode of class participation. An online contribution might be another. Helping out your classmates with their projects is still another. If you are not sure how you can or should contribute to the course, please come meet with me during add-drop, or send me an email.

Weekly cleaning

While I strongly encourage you to focus on the assigned readings, students will sometimes make unavoidable references to other authors, technologies, artworks, people, and other things that are not on the syllabus or in the readings. Each week, one or more students will be assigned the role of “cleaner” to follow up with classmates and add references to a collective classography of shared references. If you mention something like this in class (for instance, dropping the name of an artist you like, or adding a Foucault reference to comment in class), you should email the week’s cleaner with an appropriate reference. If you’re the week’s cleaner, you should email classmates who make external references to ask for (as appropriate) a citation or web link as appropriate after class.

II. Mess Around With A Machine Learning System (0%--you can thank me now)

During the term, there will be several opportunities to interact with, experiment with, and try out machine learning systems. Perhaps you want to adopt one as your own. I recommend spending a little time playing around just to see what it does, and what it’s like to work with.

You may wish to create a fake email account so you don’t get spam to your main email address.

III. Get comfortable talking about technology (0%--you’re welcome)

Throughout the term we’ll do little exercises to help you get more comfortable describing the interrelations of culture and technology. I will also set up a not-for-credit machine learning and machine listening quiz for you to check your knowledge before the big conference.

IV. The interview project (70%)

For the conference, each of you will be assigned to a group. I will assign groups after the end of add/drop. Each group will be responsible for interviewing the members of a panel at the conference about their work. Each team will also get to ask the first question at the end of the guest’s conference presentation.

Interviews (4-6 April 2024): The interview questions should be substantial, and built not only off the assigned reading, but further engagement with the presenters’ other works. Groups will be assigned after the end of add/drop, and I have blocked off a week in April where groups can spend their time reading and preparing, and we will go over interview questions on the Wednesday before the conference.

The interview itself should be recorded, along with a backup. Audio or video are fine options, but there should be some document other than a written one. Once there is a recording, the interview should be transcribed and edited, and the group may also wish to add a commentary of their own.

Didactic Project (Due 19 April): Congratulations, you've put some thinkers in dialogue. Now, join the conversation! The final project will build off the interview. It may essentially be an enhanced written/textual version of the interview, or some other multimodal engagement with the interviewees' work. I am expecting that groups will collectively author their projects at this point, but I am open to alternative proposals.

After my comments on your work, it will be submitted for publication on <https://machinelisting.exposed>.

V. The Reflection Letter (5%)

Due 21 April, 5pm.

48 hours after submitting your revised final projects, you will write me an informal email (literally, start it with "Dear Jonathan" and write it as an email) answering the following questions:

1. What did you learn about being a scholar doing the various kinds of work for this course?
2. What do you think you did particularly well? Is there an area you feel you improved on over the course of the term? What did you struggle with and how will you deal with that going forward?
3. What skill do you want to work on *next* as you go forward in your education?
4. Is there a project on sound and/or AI that you'd like to undertake? What would it be? If not, what ideas or skills from the course will you be using in your future work?
5. Do you have any questions or additional thoughts to share with me?

Preliminary Schedule

We will feel no guilt if we don't discuss all of the assigned readings for any week in depth.

We will also feel no guilt if we change the schedule. But I will announce it in class.

If you have thoughts about a reading that we did not get to in seminar, please feel free to post to our discussion forum.

Here is a link to help you do the readings: Paul Edwards, "How to Read a Book," <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

Readings are listed in chronological order for each week. No hierarchy of importance is meant by their order.

10 January: AI in the cascade of human crises; getting-to-know-you and first day business

Recommended (with explanations):

If you're going to read just one thing, this is a good statement of "where things are at now": Goodlad, Lauren M. E. "Editor's Introduction: Humanities in the Loop." *Critical AI* 1, no. 1–2 (October 1, 2023).

If you're going to read two things, this is a classic article on search that raises issues people are still discussing today:

Noble, Safiya. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

If you're going to read three things, here's an example of how I "got into" critical AI studies: Sterne, Jonathan, and Elena Razlogova. "Machine Learning in Context, or Learning from LANDR: Artificial Intelligence and the Platformization of Music Mastering." *Social Media + Society* 5, no. 2 (June 2019): 1–18.

Handouts: Things Critical Scholars Tend to Say About AI; Hermeneutic Reverse-Engineering (how I read and how I want you to read)

17 January: Some Opening Ideas

Crawford, Kate, and Vladen Joler. *Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Labor, Data and Planetary Resources*. Artificial Intelligence Now, 2018, <https://anatomyof.ai>. There is an essay and a map at this site. Read the essay, check out the map.

Heuguet, Guillaume. "Towards a Micropolitics of Formats." Translated by Fanny Quément. *Revue d'anthropologie Des Connaissances* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 2019).

Parker, James E K, and Sean Dockray. "'All Possible Sounds': Speech, Music, and the Emergence of Machine Listening." *Sound Studies*, April 10, 2023, 1–29.

Handout: Some AI Cocktail Party Knowledge

Recommended:

Phan, Thao. "The Materiality of the Digital and the Gendered Voice of Siri." *Transformations*, no. 29 (2017): 23–33.

_____. "Amazon Echo and the Aesthetics of Whiteness." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2019): 1–38.

24 January: Book Club I – Discriminating Data Part I

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong, and Alex H. Barnett. *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021.

***No class meeting this week, but read half the book. Post some comments or questions on the discussion board.

Handout: Re-read "How to Read a Book" <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

31 January: Book Club I – Discriminating Data

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong, and Alex H. Barnett. *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021.

***Continue your comments and questions post on the discussion board.

Recommended:

Stoever, Jennifer. "Introduction: The Sonic Color Line and the Listening Ear." *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, 1-28. New York University Press, 2016.

Handout: "Schools" of Technology and Causality—Science and Technology Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Cultural Studies of Technology, German Media Theory

7 Feb It Doesn't Think Like a Person....Does It?

Lewis, George. "Why Do We Want Our Computers to Improvise?" In Roger T. Dean and Alex McLean, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Algorithmic Music*, 123-130. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Lewis, Jason Edward, Noe Arista, Archer Pechawis and Suzanne Kite. '[Making Kin with the Machines.](#)' *Journal of Design and Science*, vol. Summer 2018, no. 3.5, July 2018.

Napolitano, Domenico, and Renato Grieco. "The Folded Space of Machine Listening." *Sound Effects: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience*, 10:1 (2021): 174–89.

Levy, Karen. "introduction." *Data Driven: Truckers, Technology, and the New Workplace Surveillance*, 1-15. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023.

Recommended:

Lewis, George. "Rainbow Family." *Technosphere Magazine* (2018). <https://www.technosphere-magazine.hkw.de/p/5-Rainbow-Family-5Aj9nAxzG6zFRAAd9icEvH>

Crawford, Kate. "Labor." *Atlas of AI*, 53-88. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

(If I can find a digital copy in time) Pasquinelli, Matteo. "The Invention of the Perceptron" in *The Eye of the Master: A Social History of Artificial Intelligence*, 205-236. New York: Verso, 2023.

14 Feb: Non-Objectivity

Born, Georgina. "Science, Technology, and the Music Research Avant-Garde." *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, 180-222. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, 27-76. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Suresh, Harini, and John Guttag. "A Framework for Understanding Sources of Harm Throughout the Machine Learning Life Cycle." In *Proceedings of Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization*, 1-9. New York: ACM, 2021.

Handout: The Historiography of Statistics (and Quantification)

Recommended:

D'Ignazio, Catherine and Lauren Klein, "The Numbers Don't Speak for Themselves," *Data Feminism*, 149-172. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020.

Crawford, Kate. "Classification," *Atlas of AI*, 123-150. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

21 February: Music Information Retrieval and Music Recommendation: Book Club]]

Nick Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022.

For this week we will divide up sections of the book.

Recommended:

Eriksson, Maria, et al. *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. MIT Press, 2019.

Handouts: Adversarial vs. Community-based scholarship

Re-read "How to Read a Book" <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

28 February: Space

Mattern, Shannon. "Urban Auscultation; or, Perceiving the Action of the Heart." *Places Journal* (April 2020): <https://placesjournal.org/article/urban-auscultation-or-perceiving-the-action-of-the-heart/?cn-reloaded=1>.

Kang, Edward B., and Simogne Hudson. "Audible Crime Scenes: ShotSpotter as Diagnostic, Policing, and Space-Making Infrastructure." *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, December 12, 2022, 1-27.

Ritts, Max, and Karen Bakker. "Conservation Acoustics: Animal Sounds, Audible Natures, Cheap Nature." *Geoforum* 124 (August 1, 2021): 144–55.

Recommended:

Mattern, Shannon. "Sonic Protocols." Chapter in progress.

Ritts, Max, and John Shiga. "Military Cetology." *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 2 (January 11, 2016): 196–214.

Ritts, Max, and Michael Simpson. "Smart Oceans Governance: Reconfiguring Capitalist, Colonial, and Environmental Relations." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 48, no. 2 (June 2023): 365–79.

Handout: Approaches to Sound and Space

6 March: Reading Week! Post a picture of a palm tree on the course website.

13 March: Speaker Identification and Natural Language Processing

Bijsterveld, Karin. "Slicing Sound: Sonic Skills and Speaker Identification at the Stasi 1966-1989." *Isis* 112:2(2021): 215-241.

Li, Xiaochang. "‘There’s No Data Like More Data’: Automatic Speech Recognition and the Making of Algorithmic Culture." *Osiris* 38 (July 2023): 165–82.

Mopas, Michael. "Hearing Voices: Forensic Speaker Identification Technology and Expert Listening in the American Courtroom." *Sound Studies* 9, no. 2 (2023): 209–32.

Recommended:

Li, Xiaochang, and Mara Mills. "Vocal Features: From Voice Identification to Speech Recognition by Machine." *Technology and Culture*, 60:2 (2019): S129–60.

Li, Xiaochang. "The Measure of Meaning: Automatic Speech Recognition and the Human-Computer Imagination." In *Abstractions and Embodiments: New Histories of Computing and Society*, edited by Janet Abbate and Stephanie Dick, 341–59. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2022.

Kang, Edward B. "Biometric Imaginaries: Formatting Voice, Body, Identity to Data." *Social Studies of Science* 52, no. 4 (August 2022): 581–602.

Handout: Voices, Authenticity, and the Metaphysics of Presence.

20 March: Voice, Affect, and Machine Listening

Ahmed, Alex, Levin Kim, and Anna Hoffmann, "‘This App Can Help You Change Your Voice.’" *Convergence* 28:5(2022): 1283-1302.

Kang, Edward B. "On the Praxes and Politics of AI Speech Emotion Recognition." In *2023 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 455–66. Chicago IL USA: ACM, 2023.

Semel, Beth. "Resistant Resonances: Vocal Biomarkers, Transductive Labor, and the Politics of Things Not Heard," in Atanasoski, Neda and Nasim Parvin, eds. (In production). *Technocrep and the Politcs of Things Not Seen*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Recommended:

Semel, Beth. "Listening Like a Computer: Attentional Tensions and Mechanized Care in Psychiatric Digital Phenotyping." *Science, Technology and Human Values* Online first (2021): 1-21.

Turow, Joseph. "What Marketers See in a Voice," *The Voice Catchers: How Marketers Listen to Exploit Your Feelings, Your Privacy, and Your Wallet*, 70-109. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

Handout: Sound and Affect Redux

27 March: Accent Detection

Eidsheim, Nina. "Rewriting Algorithms for Just Recognition: From Digital Aural Redlining to Accent Activism." In *Thinking with an Accent: Toward a New Object, Method, and Practice*, edited by Pooja Rangan, Akshya Saxena, Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, and Pavitra Sundar, 134–50. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023.

Pfeifer, Michelle. "Listening for a Border: Contested Expertise From Language Analysis to Dialect Identification," chapter in progress.

Olivera, Pedro. "Politicizing Acoustic Features: undoing the colonial fiction of voice-as-citizenship in the German asylum seeking system." Forthcoming essay.

Recommended:

Lawrence, Halcyon "Siri Disciplines." *Your Computer is on Fire*, eds., Marie Hicks, Ben Peters, Kavita Philips and Tom Mullaney, 179-97. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021.

Pfeifer, Michelle. "'The Native Ear': Accented Testimonial Desire and Asylum." In *Thinking with an Accent: Toward a New Object, Method, and Practice*, eds Pooja Rangan, Akshya Saxena, Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, and Pavitra Sundar, 192-210. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023: 192-210.

Handout: Prepping for Your Interviews.

3 April—Pre-conference check-in.

Groups will spend the week reading more of their authors' work and preparing interview questions. In class, we'll go over each group's interview plans, and make sure everyone feels comfortable and ready for the adventure of the next few days.

10 April: Feeding Back

We meet up and debrief the conference and the course.

19 April, end of day (however you define it): Didactic Project due.

22 April, end of day: Reflections Letter Due.

Other Policies

Accommodations and Access Needs: 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 Student Accessibility and Achievement Office 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), 514-398-8198 (TDD), [<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>].

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/>). The above commitment *also* applies to people with a personal

connection to an ongoing war, disaster, or other geopolitical crisis. However, McGill does not provide any specific support resources in these areas (that I know of).

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 the prof's), and/or the pedagogical goals of the course, in which case they might need to be negotiated.

Etiquette (same as it ever was):

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 graduate 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.” 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.

French: You have the right to submit your written work in French and in many years some students in my seminars choose to do so. If you plan to write in French, please get in touch with me during add-drop so we can talk about how to handle it. Normally it's not a problem but since there is a collaborative component to the class, we should at least discuss how it will work.

Class discussions are in English, but native French speakers are strongly encouraged to resort to French if you can't find the right word in English and we'll figure it out together. You are also welcome to read course materials in French (where they are available in French).

Nondiscrimination: If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know. I value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. In accordance with McGill's policies, I will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, 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.*

How to Interpret McGill's Inflated Graduate-Level Grades:

- A: Good work
- A-: Satisfactory
- B+: There is a problem with what you submitted
- B: There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
- B-: Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
- C+ or lower: Officially considered a “fail” by the Graduate Studies Office.

In rare cases, if your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, you may be asked to do it again.

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 (files get corrupted, equipment gets stolen, etc). I recommend syncing your important documents to a cloud storage service and having an external hard drive.

Policy regarding incompletes:

The K contract: At McGill, grades of incomplete are called “K” grades and they are only supposed to be assigned after the student and professor have agreed upon a contract, which means you need to approach me ahead of time and propose a timeline for getting your work done. I do not give incompletes (“K” grades) except in truly extraordinary circumstances. K grades revert to “F” grades at the end of the next term unless a contract extension is signed by both professor and student. I almost never give extensions.

The Passive-Aggressive K: Should a student fail to turn in a final project and fail to contact me well before my deadline for submission of grades, I will issue a K grade without a contract. McGill Graduate Studies, however, still expects a contract to be filed and it will be the student’s responsibility to contact Jonathan and get one in place. In these circumstances, should the project be completed at a later date, it will receive a mark. However, students who receive a “K” in this fashion will not be eligible to receive an “A” or “A-” for the course. I will not sign an extension for a K grade that was granted without a contract, and no late paper will be graded without a K contract being in place beforehand. I also cannot promise comments on a paper submitted after a passive-aggressive K.

McGill 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 for more information).

McGill Required McGill Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control [**HAHAHAHAHAHAHA YOU MEAN LIKE 2020, 2021, AND 2022**], the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

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.

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/8/10/1949/htm>

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