

Ms. Kelly Elizabeth Wright
Office Hours: Lorch 455D
Mondays and Tuesdays 5:30-7:00 or by appointment

LINGUISTICS 192: FALL 2019
THINGS YOU CAN'T SAY
Mondays and Wednesdays 4:00-5:30 Lorch 471

Under certain circumstances, urgent circumstances, desperate circumstances, profanity provides a relief denied even to prayer.

Mark Twain

Course Description

Things You Can't Say is a class about *bad* words—what they are, and what processes all languages share with respect to them. This is a class on how a word becomes *inappropriate*, about the ways *naughty* words operate in the brain. This is a class on what it means to tell people what they can or cannot say, and how that control extends through spoken, written, and signed language—and through the lifetime. Indeed, some of the language considered *offensive* in our society mere decades ago is now considered utterly mundane—and vice versa. We will investigate what kinds of topics or words are typically considered to be *taboo* or *off-limits* and how bans on *blue* language are enforced. In so doing, we'll discover that what is considered *profane* is determined by social and cultural norms, situational expectations, and individual preferences, habits, and identities; we will consider the similarity of linguistic operation beneath that dynamism. We will also discuss the cognitive paths *obscenities* take, and the psychological and physiological consequences of communicative processing. The goal of this class is to take *unmentionable* and *illicit* language as an inherently interesting lens through which to learn about human linguistic capability and creativity. *Swearing* is, scientifically and socially, cool. We will approach Things You Can't Say from the viewpoint of multiple disciplines that concern themselves with the study of Language and its use, including Linguistics, Neurobiology, Anthropology, Psychology, Literature, Rhetoric, and The Law. Students will have the opportunity to engage in self-directed research on a *pejorative* word of their choosing, and will have the space to present that research to our classroom community.

We will be talking about topics that are offensive and we will also say, read, and sign *vulgar* words, phrases, and gestures that make people uncomfortable in the wider world. Do not take this course unless you are interested in critically engaging with religious terminology used outside of prayer or ritual; graphic descriptions of bodily functions; suggestions or descriptions of sex acts; ethnic, racial, gendered, and aged epithets or slurs—or if you feel you cannot personally work to maintain open-minded, professional decorum in the presence of *reprehensible* language usage. Be ready for frank and mature discussions about controversial topics, and to work within yourself to encourage openness for reconsidering your ideas about language and society.

Required Texts and/or Coursepack

Bergen, Benjamin. (2016). *What the F: What Swearing Reveals About Our Language, Our Brains, and Ourselves*. New York: Basic Books.

Additional Papers and Materials loaded on Canvas.

If you need aid in purchasing the coursebook, please see me by Wednesday 9/11.

Course Resources

Accessibility and Accommodations:

The University of Michigan is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students, and I am committed to maximizing participation and making learning as accessible as possible for all of my students. If you have a disability and need **an accommodation to participate** in this class or to complete course requirements, please ask Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to provide documentation of the accommodations that you need. Then, please share this documentation with me as soon as possible, preferably within the first few weeks of class.

I will treat as private and confidential any information that you share. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would like to be tested, Services for Students with Disabilities can provide referrals to diagnostic services. **Here is the contact information for [Services for Students with Disabilities](#):**

location: G-664 Haven Hall phone: 734-763-3000 website: <http://ssd.umich.edu/>

Sweetland Center for Writing:

The Sweetland Center for Writing is an amazing, free resource! If you would like additional feedback or assistance as you're planning, drafting, or revising your writing assignments, you can schedule an individual appointment with a Sweetland faculty member (located in North Quad 1310) or a peer writing consultant (located in G219 Angell Hall, the Shapiro Library, Alice Lloyd Hall, and the Duderstadt Center). **You may also have an online video chat consultation with a peer writing consultant via [Sweetland's OWL service](#).**

Sweetland faculty members and peer writing consultants will not edit or proofread your work, but they can help you to understand assignments, generate ideas, develop and organize arguments, use evidence and sources, and clarify your writing. For more information, please visit:

<https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-support.html>

Course Policies

We will have fun and work hard this semester, and there will be a great deal of give and take in our discussions in class and online. This is only possible if you conduct yourself with respect—for yourself and others—allowing us to maintain a civil environment in which to learn. In general, I am asking you to **attend to the following policies**:

- come to class prepared and take pride in the work you do
- offer support and encouragement to your classmates
- listen to others carefully before offering your opinion
- talk to me if anything that happens during class bothers you (this is essential)

We will be engaging with challenging issues this semester and many of you may have personal stakes in these issues that you feel quite passionately about and will want to vehemently defend. I must respect your opinions, and it is my solemn pledge to you to do that. I expect some of you to voice opinions that conflict with my own and those of other students. You must, however, express *your* opinion in a manner that is respectful, civil, and not disruptive to the class.

The University of Michigan is committed to cultivating and nurturing an environment in which every student, staff, and faculty member feels and knows they belong. Further, any activity *will not be tolerated* that intimidates, demeans, mocks, degrades, marginalizes, or threatens individuals or groups based on that individual's or group's actual or perceived: Ability (physical, psychological, and cognitive); Age; Ancestry; Citizenship or immigration status; Ethnicity; Gender; Gender Identity; Gender Expression; Linguistic Identity or Expression; Parenting and pregnancy status; Race; Religion; Religious practice; Sexual orientation; or Veteran status.

Such offense—**and this is important**—can occur whether the act was intentional or unintentional, and may or may not be a legal act. In identifying such incidents, **the focus is on the impact on an individual or group, not the intention or motivation of the actor**. Any student who violates the rules for civil behavior in my classroom will be told to leave the session and will receive an unexcused absence for that class meeting.

Grade Questions

I will not discuss grades in any way through email – **no exceptions**. This is not only a policy of mine, but a university privacy issue and an issue of federal privacy policy (FERPA). I am happy to discuss grades, participation, and performance at any time during the semester as long as the discussion is **in person during office hours or by appointment**. Do not approach me after, before, or during class to discuss grades. It is your job to monitor your grades; to know your attendance; and to be aware of how much you are engaging with the class.

Please note: If you have accrued more than two (2) unexcused absences for the semester or have turned in **any** minor assignments late (not resultant from excused absences) **you can be certain you will not receive an “A” for this class** regardless of the quality of the work you have turned in.

Attendance

Because our course foregrounds discussion, close engagement with readings, and close engagement with each other's commentary, attending class is crucial for your own success and for the success of the course.

You may miss two (2) class sessions without penalty.

I will excuse your absence if you bring me a note from a doctor or health professional, a signed letter from a University team or program, or documentation of a family emergency. Once you have reached your limit of two unexcused absences, **I will lower your final Daily Participation grade** by one letter for each additional absence (i.e., an “A” grade will become a “B”). The daily participation grade is worth 20% of your final grade. If you miss class, please ask another student to share their notes and tell you about what you missed.

Please make sure to arrive on time for class. Arriving late causes you to miss important material and is disruptive to others. I will count three (3) late arrivals as one (1) absence, penalized as above.

Religious Observances

If a class session or due date conflicts with your religious holidays, please notify me **no later than Wednesday, September 11th 2019** so that we can make alternative arrangements. In most cases, I will ask you to turn in your assignment ahead of your scheduled absence, but in accordance with UM policy on religious/academic conflicts, your absence will not affect your grade in the course.

Cell Phones, Electronic Devices, and Laptops

Please be sure to turn off your cell phones and put all electronic devices in your bags before class begins. It will be distracting for all of us if you text or use an electronic device during class, so I will mark you **absent for the day** if you do so.

If you expect a call during class (e.g., for a family emergency), please let me know in advance.

For most days of the semester, I will ask that you refrain from using your laptop in class. Laptops tend to make us far less attentive to each other and far more susceptible to online distractions.

Please plan to take notes by hand. On a few specified days of the semester, I will allow you to use laptops for classroom activity; I will announce in advance when laptops will be permitted. If I find that you are not on task while technology is in use, I will mark you absent for the day. If I find that using laptops distracts all of us from achieving our learning goals, I will no longer permit any use of laptops during class.

If you have any accessibility needs or concerns related to technology, please come talk to me.

Canvas

[The Daily Schedule](#) will change during the semester. This is a living document; what I have provided you is **a scaffolding**, so you can have a general idea of the arc of the course. You will be responsible for being present in class to be informed of inevitable changes as they arise. All major assignments will have guiding documents posted to Canvas outlining the expectations for each

particular project. You will be given detailed assignment sheets at the beginning of each unit in class and on Canvas. Please refer to these documents for details about assignments *as you complete them*. In general, assignments will require a creative title, your name, my name, and the date, but this is particularly important for items posted to Canvas.

You are responsible for keeping backup copies (and I recommend several) of all your work. Electronic copies of work can be saved to Google Drive or [MBox](#), free tools provided with your UMich email account. You are also responsible for checking to make sure that your assignments are posted to Canvas on time, in the right location, and in the right format. Email submission of assignments will harm your ethos, so make the effort to understand the submission system and **plan ahead** for technical issues. Likewise, a printer or computer malfunction is not an acceptable excuse for late or missing assignments.

We will use Canvas discussion boards and [Perusall](#) to interact with each other outside of class. This will be demonstrated in class early in the semester, and digital fluency there will not be an issue. Your chapter presentation (if using visual aids) must be composed in Google Slides or Docs, and must be uploaded to Canvas **at the start class time**. Your other written assignments must be submitted in .docx, .pdf, or .rtf format through Canvas. **You may compose in Pages, but you will need to convert to another format before uploading to Canvas.** Finally, it is your responsibility to make sure each project is properly submitted in the correct format.

Office Hours

I look forward to meeting with you individually during office hours, but these hours are **for You**. They are not punishment, nor does your presence in them reflect your skill level. Office Hours are an **opportunity** to meet one-on-one with instructors, to share your ideas and your exciting questions, to air your confusions and concerns, and to receive **instant and individualized feedback**. We'll meet for at least **one required conference** this semester, at the date of your choosing, and this will contribute to your Daily Participation grade. I also encourage you to come to my office hours throughout the term. We can talk about your assignments, issues that we've been discussing in class, any difficulties that you're having, and/or your future plans. If your schedule conflicts with my weekly office hours, **please email me at least 24 hours** in advance so that we can arrange to meet at another time.

I want you to find my office to be a safe space where you will be taken seriously. I am here to help you succeed, but I cannot help you all in the same way. I have an appreciation for your struggles and stressors because I have lived and am living through them too. Please take advantage of my time; it is a resource. **Do not wait until you feel you are drowning to come see me**, especially if you are concerned with our course content and are finding the themes difficult to digest, or are (unduly) offended by the material, your fellow students, or myself. If you have any issues, concerns, or questions that need special attention, or if you feel the need to make sure you are on track and we are both on the same page, please come see me. Often the best way to make sure you're up to speed is to check in on a regular basis. I want this space to be

collaborative—highlighting your strengths, as well as your concerns—and receptive—highlighting areas of needed improvement, if any, on my part and yours.

Instructor Communication

Email is my preferred method of communication. If you email me after 6:00pm, I will respond by the next weekday (excluding holidays). Email will be the official way for me to relay something important to you—including homework details and schedule changes—therefore, **please check your email at least once per day**. Due to FERPA regulations, I cannot discuss grades over email or after class in the presence of other students. To discuss a grade, please make an appointment or come to office hours.

Please be courteous and professional in your correspondence and in your expectation of a response - this is good practice for the kind of communication you'll be expected to engage in once you enter the working world. When you email me (or any other professional), be sure to use common academic correspondence etiquette. This includes:

- using a descriptive subject line
- starting with a respectful/preferred greeting (mine is Ms. Wright, **not Mrs.**)
- using capitalization and punctuation throughout
- ending with a signature of your name

If I have multiple student emails pending, and other students have used the preferred format, I will attend to their needs first.

Further, I will not answer emails containing questions whose answers can be found in this document. I have made every effort to craft a clear and comprehensive syllabus for You and will abide by its statutes and guidelines consistently. If you email me now with "I am a reader" in the subject line, I'll give you 10 participation points. This syllabus will always be available to you under the Syllabus tab and in Files on Canvas. If you do not receive a prompt response from me, chances are the information you seek is right here in this document.

Grading Standard

I will hold your work to high standards for two reasons:

1. I believe that it is **crucial** for you to learn to communicate your ideas in different media; most people will find writing more difficult than speaking. Although I may know what you're trying to say because I have heard you discuss your ideas during class or in office hours, or because I have a general concept your topic, I will evaluate your written work on the basis of how well the words on the page communicate an idea, tell a story, or construct an argument. I will evaluate your presentations on the basis of how well they are constructed to communicate an idea, tell a story, or construct an argument. Above all, clarity and concision are valued.

2. Developing your abilities as a scholar will help you to succeed in your remaining classes, in graduate or professional school, and in the workplace. It is my responsibility to prepare you for those arenas as a reader, writer, listener, and researcher. You may not enjoy receiving rigorous feedback—or a “B” or “C” on an assignment—but receiving **honest feedback** will enable you to improve your scholarship and achieve greater success in your post-college career.

You will need to perform work that is consistently above average in order to receive a letter grade of “B” or “A” in the course. The grading standard for the course will be as follows:

“F” designates “incomplete” work.

Major assignment components are missing, incomplete or excessively late without permission of instructor and/or demonstrates lack of effort and/or lack of understanding of central course concepts.

“D” designates “poor” work.

Work is incomplete, late and/or of a level that only partially meets expectations and/or is largely unacceptable given the student’s current level of study and standing. Products demonstrate limited understanding of course issues and exhibit little analysis and/or contains significant grammatical or factual errors and insufficient/incorrect/inconsistent use of citation and referencing drawn from few (if any) low-quality sources. Technology was not used or inappropriately used in research, analysis, and/or presentations.

“C” designates “average” work.

Work is partially incomplete, late (with instructor permission/approval) and/or of a level that only partially meets expectations and/or that does not meet acceptable standards given the student’s level of study. Products demonstrate inconsistent or superficial understanding of course issues with little analysis demonstrated and/or contains significant grammatical or factual errors and incorrect/inconsistent use of citation and referencing drawn from limited and/or mixed quality sources. Technology was minimally or inappropriately used in research, analysis, and/or presentations.

“B” designates “good” work.

Work is complete, of a level that meets expectations and is of a quality that is acceptable and appropriate given the student’s current level of study. **Products demonstrate a solid understanding of course issues, good analysis, and are clearly and neatly presented with limited errors in grammar or fact, and citation and source referencing in generally consistent style (MLA or other) drawn from a good range of sources.** Technology was explored and where appropriate, utilized in research, analysis and/or presentations.

“A” designates “excellent” work.

Work is complete, original, insightful, of a level and quality that significantly exceeds expectations for the student's current level of study. Products demonstrate in-depth understanding of course issues, a high level of analytical skills, are clearly and creatively presented with negligible errors in grammar or fact, citation and source referencing, in proper and consistent style and drawn from an extensive and wide range of quality sources. Technology was explored and where appropriate, effectively utilized in research, analysis and/or presentations.

Grading Scale

	B+	C+	D+
	87-89.99	77-79.99	67-69.99
A	B	C	D
93-100	83-86.99	73-76.99	63-66.99
A-	B-	C-	D-
90-92.99	80-82.99	70-72.99	60-62.99

Participation

The success of our course depends on each of you being prepared to participate. Effective participation entails being an engaged reader. As you're reading materials for class, please adopt whatever strategies will enable you to **stay alert and active as a reader**, such as: identifying pages or passages that contain especially confusing or intriguing material (I use a highlighter); underlining or flagging important passages and key phrases; writing key words at the top of various pages (I use paragraph summaries: *telling me X*; *more description*); writing notes in the margins of pages or in a digital or physical reading journal (I record mine); jotting down questions that you want to raise about the reading. Please make sure to bring reading notes to class on the day that we'll be discussing a reading. **Reminder:** you will not have access to technology during class most days and are expected to take handwritten notes.

Effective participation entails being an engaged listener and balanced contributor. If you tend to talk a lot in class, please try to leave room for other students to speak. If you tend to be quiet in class, please make an effort to add to our conversation. **Participation can take many forms**, including:

- identifying a passage or section that you find difficult to understand
- offering a comment or reflection about materials during class
- posing a question or responding to others' questions in discussion
- sharing an insight from your group assignment

- posting an observation or question on our online course site
- making links between our discussions and events in the wider world
- listening carefully and respectfully to other students' contributions

Major Assignments

Words Paper (Midterm): 25%

You will choose a profane word or phrase and conduct a word history analysis that goes beyond a search in the OED. This paper will be 3-5 pages of academic prose due by Midterm.

The objective of this assignment is to equip you with the skills to do lexicographic research and corpus-based analysis. This assignment will demonstrate that you understand the history of a word and the effect it has on its contexts of usage overtime and today, to reflect on current domains and registers of usage and to assess its taboo status.

In-Class Presentations: 5%

You will construct and deliver a 5-minute presentation of your Words Paper, so that your peers can learn about the words you've now become an expert on.

The objective of this assignment is to introduce you to the process of restructuring academic work made in one medium to another (written to spoken), which you will do after incorporating commentary from myself and your peers. This assignment also functions in giving you the opportunity to refine and present original work and opens up space for us to discuss our thoughts on your subject as a community of scholars.

Observations in The Wild: 10%

Occasional Discussion posts tied to chapter topics that require you to observe pejorative language being used in the world around you and/or metalinguistic commentary about pejorative language occurring in the world around you. You will describe, report, and analyze the usage and/or topics you've been tasked with observing in a discussion post due before class, and we will use your observations to fuel our discussion in class on those days. Observations from The Wild are worth two (2) points each, and six (6) total points are needed for full credit. *Extra credit is available if all Observations are completed.*

The objective of this assignment is to encourage you to be finding and analyzing the usage of the terms and the presence of phenomena under discussion in this course in their in contemporary, contextual nuance. Too, this assignment functions to create a low-stakes space for each student to participate in our collective knowledge-building, and allows for active engagement with the surrounding community.

Chapter Presentations: 10%

The objective of this assignment is to ensure attentive reading, for you to take personal ownership in our community learning, and to encourage all voices to be equally active in the classroom. You

will be required to present, in a group of three, **once** in the semester on the given homework chapter to begin our discussion in class the day that chapter is covered. This can involve presenting a summary, designing an exercise, or organizing a series of questions for your classmates to consider. These presentations are informal in the sense that their format is not strictly regulated, but they are important in the sense that they are worth a significant portion of your grade--a high stakes method of measuring your overall engagement with the text for this class, an opportunity to demonstrate that you can think critically and work collaboratively on a complex topic.

[Follow this link](#) after September 6th at 10:00 PM to sign up for your chapter presentation. Feel free to skim through the textbook chapters for a preview of the possible topics.

Plan accordingly your reading schedule with your group so that you have time to *collaborate at least once* together after everyone has read the chapter. I will make available all digital spaces on Canvas to facilitate your coordination in these matters. You will be graded on three criteria: the working notes you keep while reading the chapter; your contribution to the presentation in class; and your short response/self-assessment completed after the in-class presentation.

Daily Participation: 20%

You will earn participation points for contributing to in-class discussion and for responding to the weekly discussion posts of your peers. You will earn points for participating openly and cooperatively during in-class group work and workshop sessions. Participation points will be updated quarterly on Canvas; updates in office hours by request.

The objective of this requirement is to create a culture of free-flowing commentary; to ensure when you are not doing a chapter presentation you have a way to receive credit for contributing to discussion; to create a culture of open exploration and scientific investigation in our classroom. All of our small homework assignments (mostly reading responses) will contribute to this grade as well, ensuring that you receive *credit for preparing for class*, whether you join in discussion or not.

Final Exam: 30%

The final exam will be take-home and you will have one week to complete it using *only* your textbook and class notes. The exam will consist of a combination of T/F, Short Answer, and Essay questions. The objective of this assignment is to give you a space to demonstrate a command for the overarching topics of this course, which are the nature of profanity, linguistic universals, socialization's role in acquisition and pejoration, censorship and best practices (if any) for protecting the innocent and the defamed.

Living Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Assignment
Wednesday 9/4	Welcome! Hate Speech vs Free Speech	Introduction Discussion Read Ch. 1 WTF (pgs. 1-28)
Monday 9/9	Ch.1 The Profane	Course Introduction
Wednesday 9/11	Observations from The Wild Group Work In Class	
Monday 9/16	Chs. 2 & 3 Typology and Universality	Ch. 2 Presentation: (pgs 29-48)
Wednesday 9/18	Observations from The Wild Group Work In Class	Ch. 3 Presentation: (pgs. (49-82)
Monday 9/23	Chs. 4 & 5: Profanity and Gaffes	Words paper Proposal Due Ch.4 Presentation: (pgs. 83-98)
Wednesday 9/25	Hill (2008) Ch.4 Gaffes: Racist Talk without Racists (Pages: 88-118)	Come ready to discuss Hill
Monday 9/30	Ch. 6: Grammar	Ch. 6 Presentation (pgs. 121-140)
Wednesday 10/2	Hoeksema and Napoli (2008) The Grammatical Versatility of Taboo Terms Group Work In Class	Come ready to discuss Hoeksema and Napoli
Monday 10/7	Guest Lecture Sarah Thomason: Language Change Over Time	Come ready to pay close attention to Dr. Thomason and ask questions. Words Project Proposals due Tuesday 10/8 11:59 pm
Wednesday 10/9	Ch. 7: Change Over Time	Ch. 7 Large Group Discussion (pgs. 141-164) Read <i>Shitty First Drafts</i>
Fall Break October 14-15 th		
Monday 10/21	Words Project In-Class Workshop	Come with Shitty First Drafts
Wednesday 10/23	Ch. 8: Acquisition	Ch. 8 Presentation (pgs. 165-178) Words Project Due Friday 10/25
Monday 10/28	Guest Lecture Robin Queen: Taboo language on the airwaves	Come ready to pay close attention to Dr. Queen and ask questions.

Wednesday 10/30	Ochs (1982) Talking to Children in Western Samoa	Come ready to discuss Ochs
Monday 11/4	Chs. 9 & 10: Censorship	Ch. 9 Presentation (pgs 179-196)
Wednesday 11/6	Observations from The Wild Group Work In Class: Lenny Bruce and the FCC	Ch. 10 Presentation (pgs 197-214)
Monday 11/11	Slobe (2016) Creepy-Ass Cracker	Come ready to discuss Slobe In-Class Group Work
Wednesday 11/13		In-Class Presentations
Monday 11/18		In-Class Presentations
Wednesday 11/20	Ch. 11: The Paradox of Profanity	
Monday 11/25	Observations from The Wild Group Work In Class	
Thanksgiving November 27 th		
Monday 12/2	<i>I Am Not Your Negro</i>	Come ready to discuss Baldwin
Wednesday 12/4	Guest Lecture: Benjamin Bergen	Come ready to ask Dr. Bergen all your burning questions about profanity
Monday 12/9	Final Exam Review	Take-Home Final Exam due Monday 12/16
Classes End December 11 th		