

# PHIL 23104: Doing Things with Words

**Time and Place:** Monday/Wednesday, 3:00-4:20, Cobb 319

**Instructor:** Ryan Simonelli

**Email:** [simonelli@uchicago.edu](mailto:simonelli@uchicago.edu)

**Office Hours:** Thursdays 3:00-5:00 or by appointment in Rosenwald 216. Link for sign up sheet [here](#) (if you're looking at this digitally) and on the Canvas site.

## 1 Course Overview

Words, it might seem, are for saying things, communicating bits of information. And, of course, they are for that. However, there are all sorts of things that we can *do* with the use of language that go beyond simply *saying* things. We can, for instance, make a promise, forbid someone from doing something, or exclude someone from our community. These are all different kinds of “speech acts” we might perform, and they form the topic of speech act theory. This class, a venture into speech act theory, will look at these different types of speech acts while seeking to develop a unified framework for thinking about them based on the thought, variously spelled out by the theorists we’ll read, that speech acts work by shifting the norms to which speakers take themselves to be bound. We will start with the philosophical foundations of speech act theory, starting with the pioneering work of Ludwig Wittgenstein before turning to J.L. Austin’s seminal *How to Do Things with Words*. We will then turn to contemporary developments of speech act theory, focusing on one area where it has been most fruitfully applied and developed in recent years: social, and especially feminist, philosophy. Specific topics in this part of the course will include subordination, silencing and other forms of discursive injustice, discriminatory speech, and gender identification. We will finally turn back to think about the speech act of simply saying something with the conceptual tools we’ve developed in thinking about the various other things we do with words. Beyond Wittgenstein and Austin, readings will be from contemporary sources with work from Rae Langton, Jennifer Hornsby, Cassie Herbert, Quill Kukla, Mary Kate McGowan, Mark Lance, and Robert Brandom among others.

## 2 Course Requirements and Expectations

**Papers:** The main medium in which philosophy is done is argumentative papers, and so the main assignments for the course are argumentative papers where you will be doing philosophy yourself. There will be two papers, a shorter one (5-6) worth 25% of the total grade, and a longer one (8-10 pages), worth 35% of the total grade. I will provide a list of possible essay topics for each of the essays, but you're also welcome to write on whatever topic you'd like to write on. Just make sure that you have a clear aim in your paper (something you're trying to show) and that you make this aim clear to your reader (me). If you're unsure whether a potential topic is a good one, just send me an email or come to my office hours. We will spend some class-time before your first papers are due talking about how to write a philosophy paper, but a helpful guide can be found here: [www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html)

**Extensions and Late Work Policy:** I understand that things (both academic and non-academic) can come up that make it difficult to complete work by the designated due dates and that a few days of extra time can sometimes make the difference between a bad paper and a good one. So, if there's a legitimate reason you cannot turn in your paper on time, I'm generally willing to grant an extension. The amount of extra time granted will be decided on a case by case basis, based on needs. If you do need an extension, please do so as soon as you know you'll need it. Late work submitted without an extension having been granted will be penalized by 5 points for each day that it is late.

**Participation:** Participation is worth 20% of the total grade. This comes in two forms, each worth 10%. First is engagement in class discussion. Second, for *one of the two classes* each week you are expected to submit a discussion question or a reply to a discussion thread before 8am the day of class. These can be very simple questions or replies, and you don't need to spend a lot of time constructing them. One sentence is totally fine, and, as a general rule, they shouldn't be more than three sentences long. The point of these discussions is just to get you thinking critically about the texts before class and to give us a jumping-off point in class discussion. Discussion questions and responses are to be submitted in the "Discussions" section of the Canvas page.

**Guidelines for Class Discussion:** Class discussion is a collaborative enterprise, and, as such, I see optimal engagement in class discussion as consisting in listening to one's peers no less than in speaking oneself. I find it to be helpful for my own moderation to deploy the following convention:

- **Hand:** Raising a new question or making a new comment.
- **Finger:** Directly responding to or building on what someone else has just said.

**Readings:** The main readings for the course are primary sources in philosophy. The only philosophical readings you are expected to do are the main readings.

However, for most of the readings, I have also included supplementary readings, background readings, secondary readings, and/or interviews that may be helpful or interesting. *These are all optional.* Read or watch or these things as your time and interest dictates.

The one book that is required for class is the following:

J.L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*. Second Edition. Edited by J. O. Urmson Marina Sbisà.

This will be available at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore, and it's recommended that you get it there if you can. All other readings will be available on the Canvas site under the "Files" section, and any links are included on this syllabus.

### 3 Diversity and Accessibility

**Diversity:** As an instructor, I am actively committed to creating an inclusive classroom environment where diverse backgrounds and viewpoints are recognized, respected, and valued. If there is anything you believe I should be doing differently, I welcome any feedback both during and outside of class. I pledge to take any comments regarding my teaching or content seriously and without defensiveness.

**Accessibility:** The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000  
Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

### 4 Class Schedule

**Class 1, Wednesday 1/4: Introduction** No assigned reading.

*No Class Monday 1/9*

**Class 2, Wednesday 1/11: Frege and Wittgenstein on the Uses of Language**

**Main Readings:**

Frege, "The Thought," excerpt  
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §1-27, 89-124

*No Class Monday 1/16: Martin Luther King Day*

**Class 3, Wednesday 1/18: Wittgenstein's Expressivism**

**Main Reading:**

Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*, pages 65-70  
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §243-304

**Secondary Reading:**

Finkelstein - "Expression and Avowal"

**Class 4, Monday 1/23: *How to Do Things with Words*: The Basic Phenomenon and Initial Characterization**

**Main Reading:**

Austin – *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 1-3 (3 can be skimmed)

**Class 5, Wednesday 1/25: *How to Do Things with Words*, continued: Difficulties in Characterizing the Performative**

**Main Reading:**

J.L. Austin - *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 4-6 (6 can be skimmed)

**Supplementary/Background Reading:**

Grice - "Logic and Conversation"

**Class 6, Monday 1/30: *How to Do Things with Words*, continued: Starting Fresh: Locution, Illocution, and Perlocution**

**Main Reading:**

J.L. Austin - *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 7-9

**Class 7, Wednesday 2/1: *How to Do Things with Words*, continued: Pinning down the details**

**Main Reading:**

J.L. Austin - *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 10-12

**First Essay Due Friday, February 10 at 11:59pm**

**Class 8, Monday 2/6: Pornography and Subordination**

**Main Reading:**

Langton – “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts,” Part I

**Background Reading:**

Mackinnon – *Only Words*, Part III: “Equality and Speech”

**Interview with Langton:**

Rae Langton - “Pornography, Speech and Silence” (up to 19:05)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi7-\\_aYPzsk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi7-_aYPzsk)

**Class 9, Wednesday 2/8: Pornography, Silencing, and the Restoration of Voice**

**Main Reading:**

Langton – “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts,” Part II  
Herbert – “The Speech Acts of ‘Me Too’”

**Supplementary Reading:**

Hornsby and Langton – “Free Speech and Illocution”

**Interview with Langton:**

Rae Langton - Pornography, Speech and Silence (from 19:05 on)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi7-\\_aYPzsk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi7-_aYPzsk)

**Class 10, Monday 2/13: Discursive Injustice**

**Main Reading:**

Kukla – “Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice”

**Supplementary/Background Reading:**

Fricker – *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter One: “Testimonial Injustice”

**Class 12, Wednesday 2/15: Discriminatory Speech**

**Main Reading:**

McGowan – On “White’s Only Signs and Racist Hate Speech”

**Supplementary Reading:**

Saul – “Racial Figleaves, the Shifting Boundaries of the Permissible, and the Rise of Donald Trump”  
Herbert – *Exclusionary Speech and the Constructions of Community*, Chapter 3

**Class 13, Monday 2/20: Gender Ascriptions and Identifications**

**Main Reading:**

Kukla and Lance – “Telling Gender”

**Supplementary/Background Reading:**

Judith Butler – “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”

**Class 14, Wednesday 2/22: Critique of “Malestream” Philosophy of Language**

**Main Reading:**

Hornsby – “Feminism and Philosophy of Language: Communicative Speech Acts”

**Supplementary Readings:**

Dever – “Formal Semantics” An example of the way of thinking about meaning Hornsby is criticizing. No need to work through in detail—just skim to get the gist.

MacKinnon – “Desire and Power,” excerpt

**Background Readings:**

Grice – “Meaning”

**Class 15, Monday 2/27: A “Speech-Act Only” Approach in Philosophy of Language**

**Main Reading:**

Brandom – “Asserting”

**Supplementary/Secondary Readings:** Same content, but the second (the secondary source) is easier to read than the first (the primary source):

Brandom – “Conceptual Content and Discursive Practice”

Wanderer – *Robert Brandom*, Chapter 2

**Class 16, Wednesday 3/1: The Declarative Fallacy**

**Main Reading:**

Kukla and Lance – “Perception, Language, and the First-Person”

**Supplementary Readings:**

Kukla and Lance – ‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’, Chapter 1

**Final Essay Due Friday, March 10 at 11:59pm**