

Philosophy of Perception: The Senses

A sample syllabus by Tiina C Rosenqvist

[This syllabus outlines a proposed (upper) intermediate course in Philosophy of Perception.]

1. Course Description

Senses are usually understood as different ways of perceiving, but how many senses are there, and how should we individuate them? What kind of processes count as perception? What are cross-modal effects in perception? Can sensory consciousness be multimodal? What can synesthesia and sensory substitution tell us about perception?

This is a seminar course in philosophy of perception with a particular focus on the senses and their interrelations. Our approach is interdisciplinary, and many of the texts we read are informed by the latest developments in the relevant empirical sciences.

2. Course Objectives

Through active participation in this course, you will develop an empirically-informed understanding of key contemporary issues and debates in philosophy of sensory perception. You will practice unpacking, discussing, and evaluating philosophical views and arguments, both orally and in writing.

3. Course Structure

In-person sessions:

The standard format for the seminar sessions is short lecture/presentation and discussion. You are expected to do the assigned readings before class, and participate actively in discussions and other in-class activities.

Each enrolled student is required to present on one of the required course readings to the rest of the seminar. The presentations should take about 20 minutes (~ 15 minutes of careful exegesis & ~ 5 minutes of critical evaluation). You should prepare a handout or a powerpoint.

- *Exegesis:* What is at stake in the debate? What is the author's thesis? What kind arguments does the author make? What are the premises of those arguments? What objections does the author consider? How does she respond to those objections?
- *Critical discussion:* Are the author's arguments compelling? Are there plausible objections that the author does not explicitly consider? Is the author's exposition of other views accurate and charitable?

Attendance is mandatory (please be on time!), but you are allowed to miss two sessions without prior notice, unless you are scheduled to give a presentation that day or expected to participate in the peer review. If you are going to miss more than two classes, prior notice is required. Depending on the circumstances, your

participation grade might be negatively affected, or you might be asked to complete a make-up assignment.

Out-of-class activities:

You are required to make a Canvas discussion board contribution about each of the required readings. In order to get full credit, you should submit your discussion post *before* the relevant class session and demonstrate meaningful engagement with the text(s). Each contribution should be *at least five sentences long*. You can ask developed questions, agree/disagree with reasons, draw meaningful connections to other course readings, etc. Late submissions are accepted for up to seven days for 1/2 credit.

You are also required to write one short paper and one longer paper. For the longer paper, you will write an outline first and workshop the outline with your peer review group.

4. Assignments & Assessment

- Attendance & Participation —20%
- Discussion Board Contributions —10%
- In-class Presentation —10%
- Short Paper (1,000-1,500 words) —20%
- Long Paper (2,000-3,500 words) + outline —40%
 - (Penalty for missing outline: 5%)

5. Course Policies

Readings

All course readings will be posted (or linked) on Canvas. You are not required to buy any books. Most of the readings come from the following collections:

- Dustin Stokes, Mohan Matthen and Stephen Biggs (Eds.), *Perception and Its Modalities*. Oxford University Press. 2015.
- Fiona Macpherson (Ed.). *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford University Press. 2011.
- Ophelia Deroy (Ed.). *Sensory Blending: On Synaesthesia and Related Phenomena*. Oxford University Press. 2017.
- Mohan Matthen (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*. Oxford University Press. 2015.

Discussion Guidelines

Since this is a philosophy seminar course, there will a lot of discussion of ideas and arguments. To make sure that these discussions remain respectful, inclusive, and constructive, here are some guidelines that we should all follow:

- Be nice. You can be critical of ideas, but remember to argue your points respectfully. Don't make fun of other discussion participants, don't use offensive examples, don't interrupt.

- Don't dominate the discussion. Raise your hand to speak. Acknowledge your fellow students' insights. Listen attentively. Think about what *you* can do to encourage others to participate.
- Ask clarificatory questions, if something doesn't make sense.
- If you feel that these guidelines haven't been appropriately followed, please let me know.

(These guidelines are based on this more extensive list that David Chalmers has put together: <http://consc.net/guidelines/>.)

Submission of Assignments

You are expected to submit all assignments on time.

To help you cope with unanticipated obstacles (illness, family emergencies, etc.), you will have an account with a total of six "late days" for the paper assignments. If you submit a paper two hours late, that means that you're spending one of your late days. If you submit a paper 25 hours late, you're spending two late days, and so on. After all your late days have been spent and your account is empty, lateness penalties apply (5% per day). No submissions are accepted if more than seven days late. No individual requests for extensions on paper assignments are granted, except in truly exceptional cases, such as hospitalization.

It is *your* responsibility to make sure that your assignments are properly submitted and readable. Corrupted files and other unreadable documents are treated as non-submissions. Formatting guidelines for the paper assignments will be provided.

Please take into account that writing good philosophy papers takes time and effort. You should start as soon as possible and write multiple drafts before you submit the paper. If you are struggling with an assignment, please get in touch as soon as possible. Writing philosophy is difficult, but I'm happy to help.

Office Hours

You are invited and encouraged to attend weekly communal office hours. One-on-one meetings with me can also be scheduled, if there is something that you would like to discuss privately, or if you can't make my normal office hours due to a conflict.

Email

I normally respond to emails within 24 hours, though I might take longer during weekends and holidays. If you have not received a response within this time frame, feel free to prompt me with another email. Discussing substantial philosophical questions, paper ideas, or grades over email is not feasible (please come to office hours for that!), but if you have questions about logistics or would like to schedule a one-on-one meeting, email away!

Laptops, Tablets, and Phones

Use of laptops and tablets in class is permitted *only for accessing assigned readings*. No phones are permitted. Empirical research suggest that the use of electronics in class

reduces long-term retention and negatively impacts class performance (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01443410.2018.1489046?journalCode=cedp20>), as well as distracts everybody around (<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-52302-001>).

If you have a good reason for why you need to use electronics in class, please get in touch as soon as possible, and we can work something out.

Academic Dishonesty

Do not cheat. Do not plagiarize. Familiarize yourself with the University's Code of Academic Integrity, and if in doubt, ask. Note that violations of the code will be reported to the relevant disciplinary authorities.

Accommodations & Accessibility

Students who require special accommodations are encouraged to contact Student Disabilities Services (<https://wlrc.vpul.upenn.edu/sds/>). If you have access needs that you think that I should know about, please get in touch as soon as possible.

Accommodations can be made for students observing religious and secular holidays. You should inform me within the first two weeks of the course of your intent to observe such holidays so that appropriate arrangements can be made. You can review the University Policy on Secular and Religious Holidays here: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/secular-religious-holidays/>

6. Resources

Omitted from this sample.

7. Class & Readings Schedule

Note on terminology:

- **“Required”** readings are the ones you are expected to read and engage with *before* the relevant class session.
- **“Recommended”** readings/podcasts/videos will give you a fuller understanding of the topic under discussion. They will likely be useful to you when writing papers. Some ideas in the recommended readings might also be discussed during in-class sessions.
- **“Optional”** readings/podcasts/videos are extra materials for when you are particularly interested in a topic.

Module I. Getting Started

- (1) Syllabus & Logistics. How to Read Philosophy? How to Talk about Philosophy?
- **Required:** Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”

(2) Philosophy of Perception: the Senses — An Introduction

- **Required:** Biggs, Matthen & Stokes (2015), “Sorting the Senses” in *Perception and its Modalities*
- **Recommended:** Macpherson (2011), “Introduction: Individuating the Senses” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*

(3) Sense Perception & Perceptual Experience

- **Required:** Matthen (2015), “Introduction” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*

Module II. Theories of the Senses

(4) Aristotelian Senses

- **Required:** “Excerpt from *On the Soul (De Anima)*” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*
- **Recommended:** Sorabji (2011), “Aristotle on Demarcating the Five Senses” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*

(5) Grice’s Criteria for Individuating the Senses

- **Required:** Grice (1962/2011), “Some Remarks on the Senses” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*
- **Optional:** Coady (1974/2011), “The Senses of Martians” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*

(6) From Sensory Modalities to Sensory Systems

- **Required:** Heil (2011), “The Senses” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*

(7) Nudds’ Moderate Error Theory

- **Required:** Nudds (2011), “The Senses as Psychological Kinds” in *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*

Module III. Analyses of Individual Senses

(8) Vision

- **Required:** Hilbert (2015), “Vision” in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*
- **Optional:** Hughes, Fendrich & Streeter (2015), “The Diversity of Human Visual Experience” in *Perception and its Modalities*

(9) Touch

- **Required:** Fulkerson (2015), “What Counts as Touch?” in *Perception and its Modalities*
- **Optional:** de Vignemont & Massin (2015), “Touch” in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*

(10) Sound

- **Required:** Kulvicki (2015), “Sound Stimulants: Defending the Stable Disposition View” in *Perception and its Modalities*
- **Optional:** O’Callaghan (2010), “Constructing a Theory of Sounds” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*
- **Optional:** O’Callaghan & Nudds (2009), “Introduction: The Philosophy of Sounds and Auditory Perception” in *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays*

(11) Smell

- **Required:** Betty (2015), “Olfactory Objects” in *Perception and its Modalities*

- **Optional:** Batty (2009), "What's That Smell?," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*
- **Optional:** Listen to the New Books in Philosophy Podcast Episode on Ann-Sophie Barwich's *Smellosophy: What the Nose Tells the Mind*

(12) Taste

- **Required:** Spence, Auvray & Smith (2015), "Confusing Tastes with Flavors" in *Perception and its Modalities*

(13) The other senses?

- **Required:** Picciuto & Carruthers (2015), "Inner Sense" in *Perception and its Modalities*
- **Optional:** Ritchie & Carruthers (2015), "The Bodily Senses" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*

(14) Review of Modules I, II & III, Writing Workshop #1

- **Required:** Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

Short Paper —10%

Module IV. Models of Perception: How and What Do the Senses Tell Us?

(15) Traditional View: The Causal Theory of Perception

- **Required:** Ayer & Cohen (1977), "The Causal Theory of Perception," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*

(16) Bayesian View of Perception

- **Required:** Clark (2015), "Perceiving as Predicting" in *Perception and its Modalities*

(17) Active Perception

- **Required:** Matthen (2015), "Active Perception and the Representation of Space" in *Perception and its Modalities*

(18) Top-down and Bottom-up: the Effects of Past Experience on Perception

- **Required:** Shea (2015), "#Distinguishing Top-Down from Bottom-up Effects" in *Perception and its Modalities*

Module V. The Interrelations of the Senses

(19) Molyneux's Question

- **Required:** Morgan (1977), *Molyneux's Question*, pp. 197-208.

(20) Cross-modal Effects & Multimodal Perception

- **Required:** O'Callaghan (2009), "Seeing what you hear: Cross-modal Illusions and perception," *Philosophical Issues*
- **Required:** Watch the following video on the McGurk Effect on YouTube: "Try this bizarre audio illusion! 🗣️ 👂 😬 - BBC"
- **Required:** Watch the following video on the Rubber Hand Illusion on YouTube: "The Rubber Hand Illusion - Horizon: Is Seeing Believing? - BBC Two"
- **Optional:** O'Callaghan (2015), "Not all Perceptual Experience is Modality Specific" in *Perception and its Modalities*

(21) Consciousness and the Senses

- **Required:** Spence & Bayne (2015), "Is Consciousness Multisensory?" in *Perception and its Modalities*

(22) Morphing Senses

- **Required:** Myin, Cooke & Zahidi (2015), “Morphing Senses” in *Perception and its Modalities*

(23) Sensory Substitution

- **Required:** Chirimuuta & Paterson (2015), “A Methodological Molyneux Question: Sensory Substitution, Plasticity, and the Unification of Perceptual Theory” in *Perception and its Modalities*
- **Required:** Watch the following video on sensory substitution on YouTube: “Paul Bach-y-Rita and Neuroplasticity”

(24) Synesthesia #1

- **Required:** Auvray & Deroy (2015), “How Do Synaesthetes Experience the World” in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*
- **Required:** Watch the following video on synesthesia on YouTube: “What Is It Like To Have Synesthesia?” (The Royal Institution)
- **Optional:** Deroy (2017), “Introduction” in *Sensory Blending: on Synaesthesia and Related Phenomena*

(25) Synesthesia #2

- **Required:** Sollberger (2017), “Can Synaesthesia Present the World as It Is” in *Sensory Blending: on Synaesthesia and Related Phenomena*.

Module VI. Wrapping Up

(26) Review of modules IV & V; Writing Workshop #2

Final Paper Outline

(27) Long Paper Outline Workshop/Peer Review in Class

(28) Final Review & Discussion

Final Paper – 30%