

COGS 155: Gesture and Cognition

Spring 2023

Lectures: Ridge Walk Academic Complex, Room 0103
Tues / Thurs, 5:00 – 6:20 pm

Instructor: **Kensy Cooperrider** (kecooperrider@ucsd.edu)
Office hours (beginning Week 2):
Thursdays, 3:30 - 4:30 pm, Mandeville Art of Espresso

TA: **Jack Terwilliger** (jterwilliger@ucsd.edu)
Office hours (beginning Week 2):
Tuesdays, 4:00 - 5:00 pm, CSB 237

Discussion section:
Fridays, 11 - 11:50 am, Design & Innovation Building, Room 122

Course description: A team of martian scientists sit down at a crowded coffee shop and start to watch the conversations happening all around. What do they notice? Unable to make any sense of the garble of sounds the humans are making, they might focus instead on the movements they see: people creating diagrams with their hands, brandishing imaginary objects, clenching their fists, shaking their heads, pointing to scones. The coffee shop could be anywhere in the world, the people could be speaking any language, the conversations could be about anything at all—our martians would still see similar behaviors. In short, the martians would immediately take note of a curious fact about our species: when we speak, we move. In this course we will take a close look at these movements, or *gestures*. We'll range over a number of topics, such as: how gesture relates to other forms of communication; how gesture provides a window into the mind; how gesture varies across individuals and cultures; the role of gesture in language development; and the (possible) role of gesture in language evolution. In addition to learning about these topics, students will develop, in a series of steps, a proposal to conduct novel research on some aspect of gesture and cognition.

Course objectives: Beyond mastering the course content, students will develop their abilities to...

- * critique cognitive scientific findings, theories, and frameworks productively
- * connect ideas across disciplines, topics, and approaches
- * propose research that addresses important outstanding questions

Schedule (provisional):

Week 1: Zooming in on gesture

(no office hours this week**)**

Tues, April 4 – Questions a cognitive scientist might ask about gesture
In-class activity (practice)

Thurs, April 6 - Defining and classifying gesture
Reading: Cooperrider & Goldin-Meadow, '[Gesture, language, and cognition](#)'
In-class activity (practice)

Week 2: The design and anatomy of gesture

Tues, April 11 – Comparing gesture to other forms of communication
Reading: Scott-Phillips, '[More than words](#)'

Thurs, April 13 – Anatomy of a gesture
Reading: Kendon, 'Gesture units, gesture phrases and the phases of gestural action' (on Canvas)
In-class activity #1
Quiz 1 assigned

Week 3: Gesturing, speaking, and thinking

Tues, April 18 – The gesture-speech relationship
Reading: Kendon, 'Language and gesture: Unity of duality?' (on Canvas)

Thurs, April 20 – Metaphors in gesture
Reading: Cooperrider et al., '[The conceptualization of time in gesture](#)'
In-class activity #2
Quiz 2 assigned

Week 4: Gesturing, speaking, and thinking (pt. 2)

Tues, April 25 – Gestures for the speaker?
Optional reading: Kita et al., '[How do gestures influence thinking and speaking?](#)'

Thurs, April 27 – Gestures during thinking
Reading: none
In-class activity #3
Quiz 3 assigned

Week 5: Gesture understanding

Tues, May 2 – How listeners integrate gesture

Optional reading: Hostetter, [‘When do gestures communicate?’](#)

Thurs, May 4 – **MIDTERM**

Week 6: Gesture across cultures

Tues, May 9 – Universals and diversity in human gesture

Reading: Cooperrider, [‘Gesture talks’](#)

Optional reading: Cooperrider, [‘Even rainbows have a dark side’](#)

Thurs, May 11 – Case study: Spatial gestures across cultures

In-class activity #4

Quiz 4 assigned

Week 7: Gesture in children

Tues, May 16 – How gestures emerge in children

Reading: Capirci & Volterra, ‘The emergence and development of a strong and changing partnership’ (on Canvas)

Thurs, May 18 – Final Projects Assigned

Reading: NONE

In-class activity #5

Quiz 5 assigned

Week 8: Gesture in animals

Tues, May 23 – Gesture in (other) primates

Optional listening: *Many Minds* podcast, [‘How do chimpanzees communicate?’](#)

Thurs, May 25 – The great pointing debate

Reading: Michael Tomasello, [‘Why don’t apes point’](#)

In-class activity #6

Quiz 6 assigned

Week 9: Gesture and language evolution

Tues, May 30 – Gesture and language evolution

Reading: Kendon, [‘Reflections on the “gesture-first” hypothesis...’](#)

Thurs, June 1 – Gesture and language evolution (contd.)

Reading: none

In-class activity #7

Quiz 7 assigned

Week 10: Why do we gesture?

Tues, June 6 – Putting the pieces together

Reading: none

Thurs, June 8 – Course wrap-up!

Reading: none

In-class activity (ungraded)

FINAL PROJECTS DUE: Thursday, June 15 @ 7 pm

Grade components summary:

Quizzes (6 x 5% each)

On Canvas. Short, open-note, covering material from previous week, to be completed over weekend. Lowest score dropped.

Total= **30%**

Group work (4 x 5% each)

In class activities (2-3 people per group). Lowest 3 scores dropped.

Total= **20%**

Midterm

In class. Mix of multiple-choice and (very) short answer. Details TBA

Total= **20%**

Final Project: Research proposal

1300-1700 words describing a research question and approach to answering it. Details TBA.

Total= **25%**

SONA participation

3 hrs of experiment participation. Hour 1 and 2 are worth 1% each; 3rd hr worth 3%. If unable to participate contact instructor

Total= **5%**

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is this course podcasted?

A: Yes, *but...* Not all of class time will be spent in lecture mode. Most Thursdays will include a long in-class activity, which will be impossible to follow on the podcast. Even during lecture mode, we will occasionally break away for small-group discussions. So to get the most out of this class, *it's important to be present in person*. The podcasts are mostly useful to help review material.

Q: Where can I find the readings for the course?

A: All reading/listening will be either: 1) linked directly from the course syllabus or 2) posted on the Canvas site for the course (see Files). Assigned reading/listening is meant to be completed by the date for which the material is assigned.

Q: Where can I find the course slides?

A: The slides for the course will always be posted on the Canvas site, in the hour or so before the start of class. Each week has a dedicated “module” with the relevant materials for that week (slides, podcast recording, etc.)

Q: What are the grading cut-offs? And will there be a curve?

A: Grades are assigned as follows:

97.5 and above = A+
92.5 – 97.4 = A
89.5 – 92.4 = A-
87.5 – 89.4 = B+
82.5 – 87.4 = B
79.5 – 92.4 = B-
77.5 – 79.4 = C+
and so on...

There will be no additional rounding applied (beyond the “rounding” built into this grading scheme). It’s very unlikely there will be a curve, but we won’t know this for certain until closer to the end of the quarter.

Q: Is my grade on Canvas accurate?

A: No. Though Canvas will be kept up to date with your grades for each assignment/assessment, the overall grade reported on Canvas will not necessarily be accurate—and may be quite misleading. Instead, calculate your grade using the weights in the summary of grade components.