

## Syllabus

### Assignments:

1. Reading and homework – We will proceed through a number of reading assignments in McCawley (though not the whole book, which is designed for a year-long course). There will be homework assignments consisting of data analysis problems, some from the book, some not. These will be due on Tuesdays, in an informal format, usually less than one page; they will be discussed and corrected in class, and not usually collected.

2. Weekly writing – Every week, except as noted, a 1-page essay on an assigned topic, carefully edited, is due on Tuesday. Four students each week will be “on deck”, responsible for bringing copies of their essay to class to distribute to everyone.

These will be read aloud, discussed, and critiqued by the class during the second hour of the Tuesday class. Students on deck should be prepared to justify any word or construction in their essay, to answer questions about their lexical or grammatical choices, and to explain what alternatives they considered in each case, and why they rejected them.

3. Papers – Two analytic papers on some grammatical topic will be written during the term. The final draft of the first, of about ten pages, is due at Midterm time (Tuesday Mar 8, after Winter Break); the second, of about fifteen pages, is due in final draft on the last day of class (Tuesday Apr 19). The papers will be written in stages, with feedback:

a) A 1-page description of the chosen paper topic is due as the Weekly assignment on Thursday Jan 27 for the first paper, and on Thursday Mar 17 for the second.

b) A rough draft of the first paper is due on Tuesday Feb 15, and of the second paper on Tuesday Mar 29. There will be no Weekly writing assignments these weeks. In the week of the submission of the rough drafts (i.e, the weeks of Feb 11-19 and Mar 29-Apr 1), each student will meet individually with the instructor to go over their draft and plan for revisions.

### Grades:

The grades will be based equally on mastery of factual material about English syntax, improvement in writing, and class participation. In addition to letter grades, R.C. students will receive written evaluations on their permanent UM transcript; see the bottom of the Course Description to see the paragraph that precedes individual evaluations.

### Weekly Writing Assignments:

Weekly themes will generally be assigned on each Thursday for the next Tuesday, as we progress through our grammatical studies. However, we have to start somewhere, so here are the first two:

1. Due Tuesday Jan 11 (i.e, right away). Read the preface to the second edition of McCawley and select a sentence from it to analyze. Write a 1-page report on that sentence, examining anything you find significant, interesting, or odd about it and its structure, and discussing what the purpose of the sentence is in its context, what job it does for the writer and the reader, and how it accomplishes that job. Be prepared to suggest alternatives to various words and constructions, and your guesses about why the author didn't use them.
2. Due Tuesday Jan 18. Collect a real sentence, used by a real person in a real context (i.e, the sentence should be spoken, not written), that you find interesting. Then write a 1-page analysis of that sentence, as used in that context, commenting on any differences you notice between spoken and written English syntax. Note: the sentence must be a complete sentence, and as far as possible should be grammatical – we are not concerned here with solecism or grammatical error, but with structure and function.

Later assignments will come more directly from our experience in analyzing English syntax and writing. In general, though, anything you read or hear or write or say is grist for our analytic mill, and you are advised to start paying at least desultory attention to the grammar of every chunk of English that you encounter or produce.

### General remarks:

In most cases, the approach to grammar that McCawley uses is going to seem strange, even counter-intuitive. A great deal of confusion is almost inevitable. Be advised that this is normal, and that it passes. If you find the material unfamiliar, this is not your fault, but the fault of those who educated you; you are not responsible for that. You are, however, responsible for yourself now. A good way of dealing with any confusion you encounter is to ask a question about it. Asking questions is basic to analysis of all kinds, and the careful use of questions is a necessary part to writing of all kinds. Treasure your questions and share them with the rest of us. Frequently.

In writing about technical subjects, one needs technical terminology. All terms that appear in **boldface** in McCawley are considered technical terms and so are the names of rules and structures which are Capitalized; you will be responsible for using them correctly and appropriately, as needed. A good way to do this is to make a list of them as they appear, with notes about their usage; these could form the basis for an essay.