

# EL4203 Semantics

National University of Singapore

2019–2020 Semester 1, Wednesdays 12:00–15:00, AS1 room 03-02

## Instructor

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Office: AS5 06-09

Office hours: Thursdays 10:30–noon

Also join us for the **syntax/semantics reading group** (completely optional)

Thursdays 4pm, AS5 fifth floor graduate reading room

<https://mitcho.com/nus/synsem/>

## Description

Semantics is the study of *meaning* in natural language. How can we formalize the meaning of a linguistic utterance? How does the meaning of a sentence relate to its structure? How do we understand sentences which we have never heard before? How is the interpretation of an utterance related to the conversational context? These are basic questions which this course will attempt to answer, using primarily examples from English as data.

We will develop a concrete proposal for the mapping between linguistic expressions and their interpreted meaning for a fragment of English, based on the Principle of Compositionality. Particular emphasis will be placed on precise descriptions and computations of meanings, using notation from mathematical logic which will be covered in the class. Students will complete the class with both the technical expertise and theoretical foundation to comfortably approach a range of work in contemporary semantic literature.

## Website

- Lecture notes will be posted on the public website, <https://mitcho.com/nus/sem2019/>
- LumiNUS will be used for submitting assignments and posting additional readings. Please make sure you have access to the module on LumiNUS.

## Textbook

Coppock, Elizabeth and Lucas Champollion. *Introduction to Formal Semantics*. Download the copy on LumiNUS > Files > Readings.

This may be supplemented by additional materials.

## Requirements

In this class we will take a hands-on approach to semantics, with equal emphasis on practical tools and theory. The course requirements are therefore designed to incentivize active practice and engagement with the material. Your grade will be determined by your performance on the following:

1. **Attendance and participation (10%):** Active attendance, participation in class, and preparation (doing the readings) are crucial for success in the class.
2. **Problem sets ( $9 \times 7\% = 63\%$ ):** Problem sets are an opportunity to use the tools and ideas from class and the readings, in order to better understand them.  
Please submit problem sets as PDFs and make sure your name is in the file.
3. **Final exam (25%):** The final exam (**TBD**) will involve application of the concepts of the class to new data and puzzles. Problems will be modeled after those in the problem sets.  
The final exam will be a 24 hour take-home exam.
4. **Evaluation (1%):** You receive one point for submitting your module evaluation.
5. **Consultation (1%):** Come meet me during my office hours, or by appointment, to receive one point.

## Schedule

**The schedule is subject to change.** Consult the website. IFS refers to Coppock & Champollion's *Invitation to Formal Semantics*. Refer to the version on LumiNUS > Files > Readings.

Oct 16

Date	Topic
Aug 14	Introduction: studying meaning
	<i>Submit:</i> Survey on LumiNUS <u>by Friday</u>
Aug 21	Sets, quantifiers, entailment
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS1, 2
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 1
Aug 28	Predicate logic
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS3
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 2
Sep 4	Basic composition
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS4
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 3

Sep 11	Modification and translation
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS5
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 4
Sep 18	Quantifiers
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS6, TBA
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 5
Sep 25	<b>Recess Week: No class</b>
Oct 2	Presupposition
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS7
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 6
Oct 9	Relative clauses and movement
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS8
Oct 16	<b>No class</b>
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 7
Oct 23	Implicatures
	<i>Reading:</i> Grice 1975 "Logic and conversation"
Oct 30	Worlds, modals, and conditionals
	<i>Reading:</i> IFS13
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 8
Nov 6	Focus and questions
	<i>Reading:</i> TBA
Nov 13	TBD + Review
	<i>Reading:</i> TBD
	<i>Submit:</i> Problem Set 9
<b>TBD: final exam</b>	

## Rules of note

- **Cooperation:** You may discuss homework assignments with other students. However, you must always submit your own write-up, and you should list the students who you worked with on your assignment.
- **Integrity:** The use of others' ideas or expressions without citation is plagiarism. You must declare all sources in submitted work. Citations don't need to be in any particular format, but they have to be there.
- **Talk to me:** I want you to succeed in this class. If any material or requirement is unclear, let me know. In extreme cases, alternative arrangements can be made for some of the course requirements, but only by talking to me first.