

LING 0150-001 Writing Systems

Below are the requirements and other details for **Linguistics 0150: Writing Systems** at the University of Pennsylvania in **Fall 2023**. The course has no prerequisites, and satisfies the [General Requirement](#) in History and Tradition (Sector II). It is a survey of the ways in which natural languages have been, and are today, represented graphically throughout the world; see the [course description](#) for more details.

Meetings

There are **lectures** twice a week for an hour.

- Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:15 to 11:14
- Location TBA

Each **recitation section** meets once a week for an hour.

- Friday, 10:15 to 11:14
- Friday, 12:00 to 12:59
- Location TBA

Office Hours

Professor Gene Buckley [\[email\]](#)

- I will have regular office hours **Mondays 1–3**, in 3401C Walnut St, room 330C.
 - I can also meet via Zoom by appointment.

Teaching Assistant (TA) – name TBA

- office hours, time TBA, in 3401C Walnut St, room 324C / 325C.
 - also via Zoom as needed.
- will teach recitations and grade the homework assignments, as well as participating in discussions and answering questions.

Readings

There is one required **textbook**, which can be accessed digitally from the links below. The text emphasizes the general historical background and basic properties of writing systems, so you should find it a good place to start before studying the more detailed lecture notes and the online readings.

- Amalia Gnanadesikan (2009), [The Writing Revolution: Cuneiform to the Internet](#), Wiley-Blackwell.
 - Access on [Ebook Central](#) through the Penn library
 - Download as a single [pdf file](#) [Download pdf file](#)

There is also an optional book, which is similar to the content of the lectures but which students with a more linguistic orientation may find interesting. You can get it at places like [Amazon](#) (where it has the Look Inside feature).

- Henry Rogers (2005), *Writing Systems: A Linguistic Approach*, Blackwell.

Finally, there are required **online readings** that go into more detail about specific systems or historical context. Links to the readings are given each week; see the [Modules](#) for each topic area.

Grading

You are expected to do the assigned readings and regularly attend lectures and recitations, since these are necessary for you to understand the material tested by written work. Don't assume that you can read the lecture slides on your own and gain the same benefit of hearing the explanations from me and then reviewing the notes later — especially when it comes to interpretation of phonetic and other symbols, where it is important to hear the pronunciations.

There are three components to the course grade. The final grade is assigned based on the model 80% = B-, 83% = B, 87% = B+. The same is true for all grade letters except that 98% is the threshold for A+. Scores close to the next grade may be rounded up for students who put forth the effort to attend class regularly and pay attention to the lectures.

Homework (40%)

There are 12 homework assignments (posted most Wednesdays, due the following Wednesday). They give practice in applying the principles studied in class and in analyzing particular writing systems, and account for a significant part of the final grade, so do not neglect them. They are graded on a scale of 0–10. Normally the assignments will be corrected in time for the recitation sections on Friday. The lowest-scoring homework assignment for each student will automatically be dropped from the grade calculation, and because of this accommodation no extra credit assignments will be offered.

All homework assignments must be submitted by the time class begins on the day the assignment is due. Click on [Assignments](#), choose the week's assignment listed there, and upload your pdf. Make sure that you can produce the correct [symbols](#) in your document, following [these guidelines](#). Any font or other technical errors are the student's responsibility, so prepare the pdf in time to get help with problems that may arise.

Late assignments will be penalized by one point, with a two-point penalty after midnight. Assignments will not be accepted past noon the following day. Make-up assignments will be provided for students with a medical or personal emergency. You are permitted to discuss the assignments with other students in the class, but you must write up independent answers and indicate the name(s) of the other student(s) on your assignment.

Quizzes (20%)

After the completion of each module, there will be a short [Canvas quiz](#) to test mastery of basic facts and concepts covered in the lectures. The quizzes will be released at 2pm each Friday (after the recitations), and due by midnight on Monday. This gives you several days during which to take the quiz, but it must be completed within 20 minutes once it starts.

Quizzes include true/false, multiple-choice, matching, and fill-in questions. They are intended to reinforce material from the module, by testing your recognition of important facts and concepts of writing in general, or aspects of a specific writing system. There will also sometimes be small analysis problems similar to the homeworks. See the [study guide](#) for advice on studying, and the [Modules](#) for topics to be covered. These quizzes serve as excellent examples of the kind of questions you will encounter on the final exam.

Each quiz is worth 10 points. As with the homework assignments, the lowest-scoring quiz for each student will be automatically excluded from the grade calculation.

Final (40%)

The [final exam](#) will be in person (assuming Penn policy does not change) and will cover material from the entire course. The style of questions is the same as in the quizzes as well as the homeworks, so you will have had a great deal of very relevant practice before you take the final exam. Making sure you understand the correct answers to the quizzes and homeworks each week is a crucial way to prepare for the final.