

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
LONDON CANADA

Department of Psychology
Winter 2027

Psychology 3223G Section 001

Introduction to Animal Communication

1 Calendar Description

All animals communicate, both within and across species, but the ways that they do so are diverse. In this course we will examine the processes and forces guiding the evolution of communication in animals, including both the underlying mechanisms responsible for producing and receiving signals as well as the evolutionary forces shaping those signals.

Antirequisites: Not Applicable

Prerequisites: One of Psychology 2220A/B, Psychology 2221A/B, or Neuroscience 2000, PLUS registration in fourth year Main Campus Honours Specialization in Psychology, fourth year Honours Specialization in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, fourth year Honours Specialization in Neuroscience, or fourth year Honours Specialization in Animal Behavior. Fourth year Main Campus Psychology students and Main Campus Psychology Special Students who receive 70% in the prerequisite course may enroll in this course.

3 lecture hours; Course Weight: 0.5

Unless otherwise stated, students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all prerequisites prior to enrolling. Where prerequisites have not been met, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the course. In accordance with Western policy, this decision is not subject to appeal.

In the event of a discrepancy between this outline and Senate or University policies, the latter shall prevail. The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of this course outline for pedagogical or operational reasons. Any such changes will be communicated to students in a timely manner.

2 Course Information

Instructor:	Dr. Carrie Branch
Office & Phone:	AFAR 201
Office Hours:	By Appointment
Email:	cbranch6@uwo.ca

Teaching Assistant: TBA
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA
Email: TBA

Time and Location of Classes: Mondays 1:30 – 4:30 pm, UC 3220

3 Course Materials

Principles of Animal Communication (2nd edition) by Bradbury and Vehrencamp

Approximate cost of textbook via Amazon.ca, \$200.00

4 Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

This course will follow a seminar style format, where we will read and discuss primary scientific literature to obtain a better understanding of the diversity and causes of animal communication. We will examine the processes and forces guiding the evolution of communication in animals, including both the underlying sensory mechanisms responsible for producing and receiving signals as well as the evolutionary forces shaping those signals. As part of this course, you will demonstrate mastery of the core principles of animal communication, discuss and explain methodological approaches to studying communication, describe the mechanistic bases of communication systems, and the function and evolution of animal signals, and formulate hypotheses, predictions and tests in order to investigate active research questions in the field of animal communication.

The following table outlines the course learning outcomes and how they are assessed.

Learning Outcome	Learning Activity	Assessment
Depth and Breadth of Knowledge	Reading	Pre-class quizzes
Describe and explain key concepts and research findings in animal behaviour.	Participating in class discussion	Discussion leading
Distinguish among evolutionary, functional, causal, and developmental questions about behaviour.	Preparing for class presentation	Class presentation
Differentiate among ecological, behavioural, and neural levels of analysis of behaviour.	Writing proposal	Written proposal
Knowledge of Methodologies	Reading	Pre-class quizzes
Use of <i>Google Scholar</i> to locate current research findings.		Discussion leading

Organize and synthesize research results. Develop proposal to study aspect of animal communication.	Participating in class discussion Preparing for class presentation Writing proposal	Class presentation Written proposal
Application of Knowledge Critically evaluate concepts and theories of primary literature. Formulate testable hypotheses about animal communication.	Reading Participating in class discussion Preparing for class presentation Writing proposal	Pre-class quizzes Class presentation Written proposal Ethogram
Communication Skills Communicate ideas and research-based evidence orally and in writing in a professional manner Colloquial sharing of knowledge on topics in Animal Behaviour	Participating in class discussion Delivering class presentation Writing proposal	Pre-class quizzes Class presentation Written proposal
Awareness of Limits of Knowledge Critically evaluate concepts and theories of primary literature. Identify gaps in literature and propose future studies to address these gaps	Reading Participating in class discussion Preparing for class presentation Writing proposal	Pre-class quizzes Class presentation Written proposal
Autonomy and Professional Capacity Work with others to share responsibilities in group project. Identify strengths in group work.	Participating in class discussion Preparing for class presentation	Class presentation Written proposal

5 Evaluation

Attendance and active participation during class time is essential and will be 15% of your final grade, this includes in-class exercises demonstrating how animal communication is studied by scientists (*these exercises cannot be made up*). Pre-course quizzes based on weekly readings of primary literature will be 20% of your final grade. Each week, 2 students will be assigned to lead the in-class paper discussion, including an active learning activity for the rest of the class (20% of final grade). An ethogram assignment will be worth 10% of your grade. You will be required to observe any non-domestic animal of your choice for 2 hours, a spreadsheet with your observations and short shares with the class will be due at the end of the term.

For the final project (35% of final grade), pairs/groups of students will work together to develop a research proposal based on a topic in animal communication. Students may choose their topic; however, it needs to be approved by the professor. Students will work together on the ideas and structure for this proposal and will present to the class together (15% of course grade); however, the written proposal will be an individual effort (20% of course grade). The written proposal will be due the last day of class and should be typed, double-spaced and ~8-10 pages in length. Style should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual.

The evaluation and testing formats for this course were created to assess the learning objectives as listed in section 4 and are necessary for meeting these learning objectives. All evaluations listed in this course outline are required components of the course and together account for 100% of the final grade. Weightings and assessment formats may be adjusted where required to support course learning objectives, with appropriate notice to students.

Policy on Missing Coursework

For all missing assignments, students will receive a zero. Late assignments will be accepted within 14 days of the due date, but will be penalized 3% for each day the assignment is late.

Make-Up exams will be held within one week of the original exam for excused absences for the Term and Final exams.

Students who encounter extenuating circumstances affecting their academic responsibilities may submit a request for academic consideration in accordance with Western University's Academic Consideration policies. Requests must be submitted through the [Student Absence Portal](#) and may require supporting documentation.

Because this is an essay course, as per Senate Regulations, you must pass the essay component to pass the course. That is, the average mark for your written assignments must be at least 50%.

This course is exempt from the Senate requirement that students receive assessment of their work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade at least three full days before the date of the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty.

Course grades within the Psychology Department are expected to be distributed around the following averages:

70%	1000-level to 2099-level courses
72%	2100-2999-level courses
75%	3000-level courses
80%	4000-level courses

In the event that course grades are significantly higher or lower than these averages, instructors may be required to make adjustments to course grades. Such adjustment might include the normalization of one or more course components and/or the re-weighting of various course components.

Policy on Grade Rounding

Course grades are rounded to the nearest whole number. No additional assignments will be offered to enhance a final grade. Requests to change a grade because it is needed for a future program will not be considered.

6 Assessment/Evaluation Schedule

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent of grade</u>	<u>Due date</u>
In-class participation	15%	weekly
Reading quizzes	20%	weekly
Leading paper discussion	20%	various
Ethogram assignment	10%	March 22
Proposal presentation	15%	March 29 and April 5
Written proposal	20%	April 5

7 Class Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings and activities
4-Jan	What is communication?	
11-Jan	Acoustic communication	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
18-Jan	Chemical, tactile, electrical	TBA

	communication	Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
25-Jan	Visual communication	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		In-class exercise
1-Feb	Origin and evolution of signals	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
8-Feb	Honest signaling	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
15-Feb	READING WEEK	
22-Feb	Mating signals	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + In class exercise
1-Mar	Agonistic signals	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
8-Mar	Food and alarm signals	TBA
		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
15-Mar	Individual recognition	TBA

		Pre-class Quiz
		Discussion Leaders + Speed Dating
22-Mar	Ethogram Shares	Ethogram assignment due BEFORE class via Brightspace
29-Mar	Research Proposal Presentations	
5-Apr	Research Proposal Presentations	

8 Academic Integrity

Scholastic offences are treated seriously at Western University. Students are expected to understand and comply with the University's standards of academic integrity. Scholastic offences may result in penalties up to and including expulsion from the University. Please read [Western's Scholastic Offences](#) policy for definitions and examples of Scholastic offences.

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

No electronics are permitted to be used during exams, this includes cellular phones and 'smart' watches.

Plagiarism Detection Software

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western and Turnitin.com.

Use of AI

Responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools is **permitted** in this course as a support for learning, not as a substitute for critical thinking or scholarly work. All use of artificial intelligence tools must comply with Western University's academic integrity standards.

Students may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot) for:

- Brainstorming ideas or refining research questions
- Improving clarity, grammar, or organization
- Preliminary or background exploration of topics

AI must not be used to:

- Generate full drafts or final versions of assignments
- Replace analysis, interpretation, or synthesis
- Fabricate, misrepresent, or cite sources that the student has not independently consulted
- Bypass engagement with course materials

You are ultimately responsible for all work submitted under your name. AI output should be critically evaluated, substantially revised, and integrated thoughtfully, not copied verbatim.

All written assignments must include a brief AI Usage Statement, indicating:

- Which tools were used (if any)
- The purpose for which they were used
- How the output was modified and incorporated

Assignments submitted without an AI Usage Statement will not be accepted. Misuse of AI or failure to disclose its use may constitute a scholastic offence and will be addressed in accordance with Western University's academic integrity policies. Students are responsible for ensuring that all work complies with Western's scholastic integrity standards.

9 Academic Accommodations and Accessible Education

Western University is committed to providing an accessible learning environment. Students with disabilities or medical conditions requiring accommodation are encouraged to contact Accessible Education as early as possible. Accommodations will be implemented in accordance with University policy. Please review [Western's policy on academic accommodations](#) for student with disabilities. Accessible Education provides supports and services to students with disabilities at Western. If you think you may qualify for ongoing accommodation that will be recognized in all your courses, visit [Accessible Education](#) for more information. Email: aew@uwo.ca Phone: 519 661-2147

10 Absence & Academic Consideration

Please review Western's policy on [Academic Considerations](#):

11 Other Information

Helpful Websites

- Western's academic policies are available at the [Office of the Registrar](#).
- Departmental policies are available at the [Psychology Department website](#).
- Learning supports available at [Learning Development & Success](#).

Well-being

Western University provides a range of supports to promote student well-being. Students are encouraged to seek assistance when needed. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Health and Wellness at Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you.

Grade Appeals

If you wish to appeal a grade, please read the [policy documentation](#) on requests for relief. Please first contact the course instructor. If your issue is not resolved, you may make your appeal in writing to the Undergraduate Chair in Psychology (psyugrd@uwo.ca).