

MUSIC PSYCHOLOGY

Fall 2025, [insert days, time, and room#]

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Tanushree Agrawal

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OFFICE HOURS: Held in Ikeda 402, by appointment using the following link: xxx

COURSE DESCRIPTION

🎵 Music 🎵 is an extremely pervasive part of our lives. We turn on music while driving 🚗 and working 💻, we listen to music at parties 🎉 and restaurants 🍽️, we dance 🕺 to music, shop 🛍️ to music, sing in the shower 🚿, and attend concerts 🎸. Yet the psychological and social significance of this huge aspect of our lives is not widely understood 😞!

We will explore a number of fascinating scientific questions, including: Why did humans as a species evolve to have music? How can music evoke powerful emotions in people? Can music be used as a tool to help people with certain medical conditions like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease? What are the similarities and differences in music cognition across cultures? Does music make us smarter, healthier, & nicer people, as many popular press articles seem to claim? By the end of the course, students will gain exposure to a wide array of topics in music psychology, and will more importantly, gain the skills to **critically analyze scientific research on music**.

The format will be highly interactive. Your work in the course will include active participation during lectures/discussions, activities to measure your musicality, short writings on a variety of topics, a few creative tasks, and a research project tailored to your interests. Music psychology is highly interdisciplinary, and the material we will cover draws from fields like music theory, psychology, biology, anthropology, and neuroscience. None of us is an expert in all of these; therefore, you are not expected to have any specific background knowledge, except for a basic understanding of empirical research methods and a willingness to think critically about science.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of this quarter, you will:

- Learn about the major areas and key theories in music psychology
- Understand the methods and scientific basis for our knowledge of music psychology
- Think critically about research articles in the field of music psychology
- Engage in discussion about how music psychology is related to your everyday lives
- Have the opportunity to conduct independent research about a related topic of your choice

COURSE MATERIALS

BRIGHTSPACE WEBSITE: Brightspace will be the primary hub for all activities, submissions, and communication in this course. You will be able to access all course materials through our class on Brightspace.

READINGS: You will be asked to read one to three short academic articles per week. PDFs of the assigned readings will be posted on the Canvas website. There is no textbook, and you do not need to purchase any other materials.

ASSIGNMENTS

RESPONSE PAPERS (BEST 7 OF 8 PAPERS, 6% EACH)

After reading the assigned papers for each week, please write a short response paper (**max 600 words per article**) and submit it via Canvas. You should briefly **summarize the article in your own words**, and **add at least 2 original discussion points**. Discussion points may include, for example, a new idea the paper inspired in you, a proposal for future experiments, disagreements you had with any claims in the paper, connections to other class material, how the material is related to everyday life, or any other thoughtful reactions you may have had in response to the paper.

Responses for the week will be due before class **at 7am** on the day we will be discussing the reading (see course schedule below for details). There will be 8 articles assigned throughout the quarter. Your lowest score will be dropped, and your final grade will reflect your **highest-scoring 7 response papers**.

Responses will be graded out of **6 points each**. You will be expected to have read the paper, and thought critically about the ideas/methods/results presented in them. You will be awarded full points if you demonstrate that you have understood the article and written a summary in your own words (2 points), and if you include at least 2 original and thoughtful discussion points (2 points each). If you choose to use any outside materials like journal articles or newspaper clippings, please make sure you cite them at the end using APA format. There is no need to cite the lecture materials.

LATE POLICY: Any submission that is not received by the deadline will be eligible for ½ **credit** as long as it is received before the final presentations on the last day of class.

OPTIONAL Q&A: Please let me know if there were any parts of the readings you found confusing or had questions about (so I can make sure to address them in class) using this form:

<https://forms.gle/GDvWvuZwva6KGrKPA>

CREATIVE TASKS (4 TASKS, 7% EACH)

As part of this course, for four different tasks, you will get the opportunity to think creatively and produce something that reflects your unique thoughts and experiences. I want to inspire you to be innovative, and let your imaginations run wild. (Creativity is a very important, but often overlooked part of the scientific process!) Each task will build on the theoretical ideas that we discussed in class that week.

The four tasks will be:

1. A music-science hypothesis brainstorm
2. The role of music during the COVID years
3. Self-reflection (or interview with someone else) on a song that elicits strong emotions, explained using any of the emotion models discussed in class
4. A Spotify (or other music player app) upgrade, or a new app idea, that enhances prosocial behavior using music

You have complete freedom to submit your thoughts in any format. Choose a format that best reflects your unique view point (e.g., a musical/audio submission, a visual mind map, a collage/mood board, doodles, a series of graphs with data, etc.). If you choose to submit in any of these unconventional mediums, please also submit a short writeup to explain your submission so that I don't miss the nuances and thoughtfulness behind your submission.

The flexibility of this submission is not meant to be intimidating! If you prefer to write a traditional essay to convey your thoughts, you will not be penalized in any way! I just want to acknowledge that, with a vibrant topic like music psychology, there may be students who prefer to express themselves in diverse ways. (I'm really excited to try this exercise because I think it will enhance your learning experience greatly. But, if you feel anxious about these tasks for any reason, please let me know and we will work on it together!)

Responses will be graded out of **7 points each**. The only expectation I have for these tasks is that you think deeply about the prompt, and communicate your thoughts clearly. You will receive 4 points for submitting anything substantial, and then additional points for any ideas that I think are particularly unique/thoughtful/interesting/well-researched/relevant to the class. Please note that I will take plagiarism of any kind very seriously.

LATE POLICY: Any submission that is not received by the deadline will be eligible for ½ **credit** as long as it is received before the final presentations (11am) on the last day of class.

RESEARCH PRESENTATION (5% TOPIC, 25% FINAL TALK)

As part of this course, you will all get the opportunity to pick a music psychology topic of your choice, read relevant journal articles on that topic, and present your findings to the class at the end of the term. You will do this with a partner from the class.

This is meant to be a fun learning experience, so pick something that really interests you and your teammate. You have full control over what topic you choose. It can be a deeper dive into something we touched upon in class or it can be something entirely new from the field of music psychology. Whatever you choose, the information you present should go **above and beyond what we already learn during the lectures**.

Towards the end of the semester, we will discuss how to put together your presentation in more detail and you will get to discuss your specific research projects with me. You can also always email me separately with any ideas or concerns you may have, or if you hit any roadblocks.

You will receive **5 points** for submitting your chosen topic along with 3 relevant academic references, and the remaining **25 points** for your final presentation. Final presentations will be graded based on your presentation skills (this component will be an individual grade per person, not a group grade), as well as on the depth of your team's research, the structure of your overall talk, and the quality of the slides.

TOPIC SUBMISSIONS (5%): Paper topics and names of three relevant academic articles (you can change these or add more in your final presentation) are due by **xxx**.

FINAL PRESENTATIONS (25%): The final presentations will take place over Zoom on **xxx**.

LATE POLICY: No credit for late work, so don't procrastinate and make sure you submit the topics/slides on time!

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Response papers:	42%	42 points (for best 7 papers, 6 pts. each)
Creative tasks:	28%	28 points (for 4 submissions, 7 pts. each)
Final Presentation:	30%	30 points (5 pts. topic submission + 25 pts. final talk)

Final letter grades in the course will be assigned according to the following percentage scale

A+	97.00+	B+	87.00-89.99	C+	77.00-79.99	D	60.00-69.99
A	93.00-96.99	B	83.00-86.99	C	73.00-76.99	F	0.00-59.99
A-	90.00-92.99	B-	80.00-82.99	C-	70.00-72.99		

Grades will be rounded to the nearest hundredth of a point and the stated letter grade cutoffs will be applied without exception. **There is no plan to "curve" grades in this course.** I reserve the right to adjust all students' grades up by a set value if deemed appropriate, and grades will not be adjusted down under any circumstances.

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Day</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Checklist</u>
..	..	Introduction to the class	
..	..	~NO CLASS~	
..	..	What is music psychology?	
..	..	<i>Activity: How musical are you?</i> Discuss this week's creative task	
..	..	Is music uniquely human?	○ Submit creative task #1 (by 7am Mon 7/10)
..	..	Evolutionary theories of music	○ Read article #1 ○ Submit response paper #1 (by 7am Tue 7/11)
..	..	Psychological functions of music	○ Read article #2 ○ Submit response paper #2 (by 7am Wed 7/12)
..	..	<i>Activity: How strongly do you feel musical emotions?</i> Discuss this week's creative task	
..	..	Music and emotion	○ Submit creative task #2 (by 7am Mon 7/17) ○ Read article #3 ○ Submit response paper #3 (by 7am Mon 7/17)
..	..	Music & emotion	○ Read article #4 ○ Submit response paper #4 (by 7am Tue 7/18)
..	..	Feeling moved by music (& more)	
..	..	<i>Activity: Does your love for music suggest that you also appreciate other aesthetic beauty?</i> Discuss this week's creative task	
..	..	The prosocial effects of music	○ Submit creative task #3 (by 7am Mon 7/24) ○ Read article #5 ○ Submit response paper #5 (by 7am Mon 7/24)
..	..	Music, social bonding, and synchrony	○ Read article #6 ○ Submit response paper #6 (by 7am Tue 7/25)
..	..	Music and child development	○ Read article #7 ○ Submit response paper #7 (by 7am Wed 7/26)
..	..	<i>Activity: What are your musical preferences?</i> Discuss this week's creative task	
..	..	Commercial music, technology, and AI	○ Submit creative task #4 (by 7am Mon 7/31) ○ Read article #8 ○ Submit response paper #8 (by 7am Mon 7/31)
..	..	Music, health, and the body	
..	..	Presentation guidelines	○ Submit presentation topics & references (by 7am Wed 8/2)
..	..	Presentation feedback session	○ Have a draft of your slides ready by class
..	..	Final presentations! ☺	○ Submit final slides (by 11am Fri 8/4)