

Advanced English: The Avant-Garde Podcast

Yasmine Richardson

Academic year 2026-2027 - **Language Department** - Fall semester.

This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 level. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Objectives

This course invites students to:

- Explore the landscape of experimental podcasting as an emerging artistic medium
- Engage in immersive, reflective, and affective modes of listening
- Analyze how avant-garde podcast practices intersect with other forms of art
- Articulate personal and critical responses to complex, transgressive artworks
- Reflect on listening as a way of knowing, connecting, and shifting perspectives.

Background

The word podcast is commonly associated with conversational interviews, serialized true crime, current affairs, and other such content designed to inform or entertain while we go about our day.

But what if a podcast could be a work of art? What would happen if we stopped multitasking and truly listened?

In this course, podcasting is approached not as consumable media, but as an artistic medium. Students engage with a corpus of audio works that are strikingly creative, emotionally compelling, and resolutely subversive. Ranging from oneiric monologues and dissonant sonic collages, to hybrid modes of documentary and fiction, these podcasts disrupt conventional narratives – social, aesthetic, and conceptual – and invite us to reconsider what art is and what it can do.

Course Description

Each session centers on the collective listening of extracts from various podcasts followed by guided discussion and critical reflection.

We hear from voices rarely amplified: incarcerated people (*Ear Hustle*), lesbian separatists (*The Heart*), vagabonds and visionaries (*Home of the Brave*), controversial artists (*Love and Radio*), anonymous confessors (*The Secrets Hotline*), and other experimental storytellers who break genre to make new forms of

art (*365 Stories I Want To Tell You Before We Both Die*, *Have You Heard George's Podcast?*, *S-Town*, *Heavyweight*).

The podcasts are put into dialogue with key themes and thinkers from the humanities and social sciences, allowing students to explore how experimental art can intersect with traditional academic approaches. Assignments include both analytical and creative writing, oral presentations, and experiments in cross-modal perception.

This course treats experimental podcasting not only as an art form, but as a method of inquiry – a way of perceiving and thinking differently. By the end of the semester, students will have developed the capacity to listen with heightened attention and nuance, and to reflect on what it means to be moved – emotionally and intellectually – by the act of listening. Aesthetic response becomes entangled with ethical reflection, as the podcasts invite us to consider the fine line between curiosity and intrusion, empathy and voyeurism, and to question the responsibilities of both the artist and the listener.

Organization

Activities will cover the four language skills:

- Listening: at the heart of the course, students listen to podcasts in and out of class
- Speaking: discussion (large and small groups) and one presentation per semester
- Reading: excerpts from a range of relevant texts
- Writing: assignments completed during class time, reflecting on the course content.