

The University of Toronto

BEGINNING YIDDISH 1¹

GERMAN 260Y1 / Summer First Semester 2021

Instructor:	ALEXANDRA HOFFMAN	Dept:	Germanic Langs and Lits
Office:	Odette Hall 326	Email:	sasha.hoffman@utoronto.ca
Online Office hours:	by appointment	Tel.:	647-609-7215

Class meets **Online** on **Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, 5-7 p.m.**

DESCRIPTION AND COURSE GOALS

Welcome to Beginning Yiddish!

Yiddish is old and new, pious and rebellious, stateless but international. It was born about a millennium ago in what is today Germany, called Ashkenaz in Jewish texts, and has travelled wherever Ashkenazim travelled, immigrated, exiled. Yiddish is still spoken as a native language by more than a million people, and is studied and spoken by Jews and non-Jews around the world who want to access the vast legacy of literature, music, religious and folk traditions, politics and history, theater, film, and humor that exist only in Yiddish. Yiddish is a Germanic language, so it is relatively easy for English-speakers to learn.



You will not regret opening the door to Yiddish, I promise! In this course, you will acquire basic reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in Yiddish. You will learn to talk and write about yourself and your interests, surroundings, friends & family. You will also learn about the history, sociology and culture of Yiddish and how Jewish life of the past centuries is reflected in the language. We may start a correspondence with Yiddish students somewhere else.

As you can see from the grading system, active classroom **participation** is very important. You will learn more by bravely speaking with some errors than by staying silent. Please help ensure that other students feel comfortable doing the same. **Homework** assignments are given daily and are always due the next class. There will be occasional **quizzes**, mainly “take-home.” Some themes or modes of communication may come easier to you than others. I am always happy to meet with you to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about the class, or to give you additional help that you might need.

¹ This syllabus owes much to the syllabi of Vera Szabo and Dr. Sara Feldman.

The last class will be dedicated to presentations of a small creative **project**. The main idea is that you get a chance to create something that will be useful to you outside of class, whether personally, academically, or professionally. Some past projects have been: translation of a historical document or a Dr. Seuss book, deciphering an old family letter, performing a song, a poem, or a skit, a cooking project, a computer game. You may want to work on your project individually or in a group.

I will ask you to evaluate much of your own effort and achievement, to guide me in providing you with a final grade. Please don't hesitate to email or call me with any questions, concerns, comments, etc.

REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION

Participation and preparation: 40%
 Homework: 30%
 Quizzes: 20%
 Final Project: 10%

BOOKS

Required:

In eynem: A New Yiddish Textbok (available for purchase from the Yiddish Book Center, first two weeks from instructor)

Yiddish Comprehensive dictionary (accessible online through the utoronto library):
<https://login.library.utoronto.ca/index.php?url=https://verterbukh.org/vb>

Recommended:

Uriel Weinreich's *Modern Yiddish-English, English-Yiddish dictionary* (available in pdf, or digital dictionaries from an approved list)

Recommended: Weinreich, *College Yiddish* (available from the Yiddish Book Center)



TEACHING AND LEARNING ONLINE CONSIDERATIONS

We will need to be patient with each other as technical difficulties and other life circumstances may slow down or interrupt sessions. We will deal with things as they come, but here are a few guidelines: 1. Please feel free to use the chat function, though please know that I will not always notice it in time, so please don't hesitate to speak up with your questions and contributions. 2. Please mute yourself if something loud is happening on your end. 3. To the extent possible and to the extent you feel comfortable, please have the video on.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS, DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS, AND ATHLETIC COMMITMENTS

If you will be observing any religious holidays this semester which will prevent you from attending a regularly scheduled class or interfere with your fulfilling any course requirement, inform your instructor of the dates of your religious holiday(s) within two weeks of the beginning of the semester or immediately if your holiday is near the beginning of the semester so that we may make appropriate alternative plans. In order for your disabilities and athletic activities to be appropriately accommodated, you must provide documentation during the first two weeks of class (or as soon as possible if a disability, including mental illness, emerges during the semester).

The University's Accessibility Services Office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor, Suite 400; Phone: **416-978-8060**; Email: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca.

The University's Health & Wellness Centre is located at 214 College Street, 2nd Floor. Phone: **416-978-8030**. <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/health-wellness/#node-1084>

GENDER PRONOUN PREFERENCES

Binary gender still plays a larger role in Yiddish grammar than in English. Currently, nonbinary Yiddishists are establishing the use of gender-neutral pronouns in Yiddish. All students may choose, and must be discussed/addressed using, their preferred pronouns. Of course, as we are learning these words for the first time, everyone is likely to be misgendered or to misgender other students occasionally! Accidental misgendering is a grammatical error, in contrast with intentional misgendering, which is a form of harassment. Please let me know if I can help you establish your preferences for this class.

JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Shvues/Shvies (Shavuot): Sunday, May 16 (sundown) – Tuesday, May 18

Tishebov (Tisha B'Av): Saturday, July 17 (sundown) – Sunday, July 18