

Faculty of Health
Department of Psychology
PSYC 3560 Section M: PSYCHOLOGY OF DEATH AND DYING
Friday 11:30am to 2:30pm on Zoom & eClass
Winter 2021

Welcome to Psychology of Death and Dying! Somehow an exclamation mark after that course title already feels inappropriate, but I'm truly excited to be teaching this course at York. I previously taught Death, Dying, and Bereavement at Ryerson University and I found it to be one of the most enriching courses both personally and professionally. I hope you feel the same at the end of this course.

After much debate, I've decided that this course will have synchronous and asynchronous components, so please read this syllabus carefully to ensure that you understand what is required of you and when it is required.

- I will pre-record my lectures on Zoom and post those to eClass, in addition to my PowerPoint slides, and supplementary materials (e.g., articles, podcasts, videos).
- I will host roughly 1-hour live sessions on Zoom every other week (alternating with the weeks in which you are asked to participate in discussion forums). These live sessions will be held during our regular class time of Friday 11:30am to 12:30pm. I'll use these sessions to answer questions, as well as to discuss the main ideas from each week. While these live sessions will be recorded and posted to eClass and they are NOT mandatory, I strongly encourage you to participate, as they are extremely beneficial to your learning and to the overall quality of the course.
- You will have 5 discussion forums to participate in over the semester, for which you will be asked to post your own response, as well as replying to 2 of your classmates. Posts will be graded for effort and quality of critical reflection and extension.
- There are 2 individual written assignments in this course (1 lossography & 1 death and the arts application assignment) as well as a small group assignment on death practices and rituals of a major world religion.
- You will have 2 tests held as quizzes on eClass. Each test will be made up of only multiple-choice questions. You MUST be available to take those tests online during our regularly scheduled class time. You should not have a conflict with another course, as you were instructed not to book two courses that overlap.

Don't panic! It sounds like a lot of components, and it is, but I assume that you enrolled in this course because you're passionate about these topics. If you put in the work, I promise you that this will be a course that changes your life. We're living through an unimaginable time with this pandemic, and I can think of no more important conversations than the ones that we will have in the course around dying, death, grief, and bereavement.

NOTE: When I tell friends and colleagues that I'm teaching Psychology of Death and Dying, their first reactions are usually ones of horror. "What a heavy course to teach!" and my personal favourite, "How is that psychology?" I explain to them that it's actually an incredibly life-affirming course, full of laughter and joy. But the truth is, this course IS a difficult one, and it is important that you know that going into it. We're going to talk about topics that are heavy and difficult. Many of us have been personally touched by loss and death, and perhaps that's why we're all here taking (or teaching) this course.

I'm going to push your comfort zone each week. I'm going to teach this course with as much care as I can, but I'm not going to avoid the difficult topics or debates. Throughout the course, I'm going to share content that may be upsetting to some of you, and I'm going to offer perspectives that may challenge your own. If you're going to get the most out of this course, you're going to need to keep an open mind. Respect for diverse opinions and experiences must be maintained at all times (e.g., during live Zoom sessions, in discussion forums, and in your small groups).

If you have recently experienced loss or death, it is up to you to decide if this is the right time for you to take this course. There is no shame in feeling like the wounds are too raw at this time. I've been there. Many of us have. Reflecting on your own experiences with loss and death is required in this course, but it's also important that you recognize that this course is not an opportunity for (nor a substitute for) therapy. I'm not a trained clinician, nor are your classmates. Rather, this is an opportunity to learn, listen, and reflect on death, dying, life, and living (yes, I totally ripped that line from the textbook title).

Instructor and T.A. Information

Instructor: Dr. Kathleen Fortune

Office Hours: Virtual office hours booked via eClass

Email: kfortune@yorku.ca

T.A.	Rebecca Lewinson	Lindsay Samson
Email	lewinson@yorku.ca	lesamson@yorku.ca
Office Hours	Virtual via eClass	Virtual via eClass

Course Prerequisite(s): Course prerequisites are strictly enforced

- HH/PSYC 1010 6.00 (Introduction to Psychology), with a minimum grade of C.
- Completed at least 54 earned credits

Course Credit Exclusions

Please refer to [York Courses Website](#) for a listing of any course credit exclusions.

Course website: eClass

All course materials will be available on the course eClass site. This includes my pre-recorded Zoom lectures, PowerPoint slides, and supplementary materials.

Course Description

This course is designed to provide you with a comprehensive introduction to empirical findings on death, dying and bereavement. It explores a range of psychological and social issues, including death anxiety, attitudes toward death, grief and bereavement, social and cultural contexts of death and loss, the mental life of the dying person, medically assisted dying, and palliative and hospice care. Emphasis will be placed on the critical analysis and synthesis of the historical, sociocultural, biomedical and psychological research on these topics. The course will consider the experiences of the dying, as well as the experiences of those left behind to cope with the loss, and those who care for the dying.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the psychology of death and dying.
2. Articulate trends in the psychology of death and dying.
3. Express psychological knowledge of death and dying in written form.
4. Describe and explain limits to generalizability of research findings in death and dying.
5. Demonstrate ability to relate information in the psychology of death and dying to own and others' life experiences.

Specific Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will have:

- Developed analytical, reflective and critical thought around one's own and others' attitudes toward death, dying and bereavement.
- Become better prepared to deal with death, dying, and bereavement when they arise in your life and in the lives of those around you.
- Developed knowledge of advanced directives, living wills, power of attorney, organ donation, and other important decisions around end-of-life care.
- Developed practical, evidence-based skills that prepare you for careers that involve dealing with the sick, the dying, and the bereaved in a compassionate way.
- A deeper understanding and appreciation of your strengths and limitations as human beings. As Plato said, "The really important thing is not to live, but to live well." I hope this course plays some small part in helping you live well.

Required Text

Corr, Corr, & Doka, *Death & Dying, Life & Living*, 8th Edition. Cengage.

You can purchase this textbook through the York University bookstore. I believe they have made hard copies, loose-leaf copies, and e-book versions available, but it is also available for purchase on Amazon and from Cengage.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

Assessment	Date of Evaluation (if known)	Weighting
Discussion Forums	TBA (5X over the term, 2% each)	10%
Death in the Arts Written Assignment	February 12, 2021	15%
Test 1	February 26, 2021	20%
Lossography Written Assignment	March 12, 2021	15%
Small Group Assignment – Death Practices	April 2, 2021	20%
Test 2	April 9, 2021	20%
Total		100%

Description of Assignments and Tests

There are a number of different assignments in this course, so please put the above stated due dates in your calendar right away.

Discussion Forums: In lieu of our normal in-class discussions, we have discussion forums. I love reading your posts and watching you learn from one another. Five times over the term (alternating with the weeks in which I'll host 1-hour live sessions) you will be asked to respond to a discussion forum post (e.g., an article, video or podcast). You will also be asked to reply to two of your classmates' posts, with thoughtful responses that extend the conversation. Posts are graded on effort, critical reflection and extension. If you put in the effort, these are free marks. The discussion forums posts are worth 2% each, for a total of 10% of your course grade.

Lossography Assignment: You will be asked to reflect on your past experiences with loss and/or death, select and describe the most important losses and/or deaths in your life, and to draw connections to your beliefs and behaviours today. You'll be asked to think about who played an influential role in your experience of and/or attitudes toward death and dying (e.g., parents, teachers, cultural figures, media). If you're never experienced a death, you can reflect on other losses you may have experienced (e.g., loss of a home because of emigration, prenatal loss, loss of a relationship through divorce or separation). I'll provide a much more detailed rubric for this assignment at the start of the course in January, but for now, start thinking about this. This lossography assignment is roughly 2-3 double-spaced pages in length and it is worth 15% of your course grade.

Death in the Arts Assignment: We'll start the course by discussing the ever-changing visibility of death in daily life. Some researchers and historians have argued that death has become invisible in modern cultures, and in many ways they're correct. However, I think that (even pandemic aside) death remains quite 'visible' - particularly in literature and the arts. I want you to find a representation of death in literature and/or the arts that speaks to you. This could be a song, a poem, a section of a novel, or a piece of art that talks about or portrays death. This is your choice, but you'll be asked to apply some core concepts from the course to whatever piece

you choose. Essentially this is a media analysis/application assignment. It's meant to help you connect some of these abstract concepts to your daily life, and also to allow for some creativity and self-expression in the course. If you're willing to share, I hope to compile a PSYC3560: Death in the Arts Wiki or blog with all of the pieces you choose (you don't have to include yours if you feel strongly about it). This assignment is roughly 2-3 double-spaced pages in length and is worth 15% of your grade in the course.

Group Assignment on Death Practices: In my 10 years of teaching I have only assigned group work once because I know too much about the challenges of group dynamics. Many of you probably groaned at the prospect of group work, but before you run away from the course screaming, hear me out. This is exactly the right course for a group assignment. This course is made better by your interactions with one another and by each of you contributing your knowledge and lived experiences. I will break you up into group of 5-6, depending on class size, and each group will work together on a project that involves exploring the beliefs, practices and rituals around death of a major world religion or culture. This is a lecture I generally struggle with delivering, as I am neither religious, nor do I have any real attachment to a particular cultural background. What usually happens is that students in the class correct my presentation and I learn from them. So teach me! Teach all of us! I know that in a class of 195 students, there are bound to be a number of you from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. This is your opportunity to educate the class. As a group, you will produce either a video or audio presentation that will be graded and shared on eClass with your classmates. Again, more details on this will follow, but get thinking about this assignment. I will put in place very clear guidelines to thwart the usual social loafing and problems of group members not pulling their weight, so rest assured I won't allow 2 students to do all the work for the group of 5-6. This assignment is due at the end of term and is worth 20% of your grade in the course.

Tests: There are two tests in the course, both held as quizzes on eClass during our regular class time. Each test will be made up of approximately 80 multiple-choice questions, for which you will have 1 minute to answer in sequential format (meaning you must answer each question as it is presented to you and you can't go back to review or change your answers). I know this is not a student favourite, but unfortunately it is standard practice during this virtual-only year. Each test is worth 20%, for a total of 40% of your course grade. See the schedule of assessment on the previous page and put those two dates in your calendar now.

Class Format and Attendance Policy

The only mandatory dates that you must be available online during our class time are two test dates listed in the course requirements and assessments table earlier in this syllabus. Please book those dates off work and/or clear 80 minutes to write the test during those dates and times. Otherwise, I strongly encourage you to participate in the bi-weekly live sessions on Zoom, but they are not mandatory. The rest of the course is asynchronous.

Grading as per Senate Policy

The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments and

tests* will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 89, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.)

For a full description of York grading system see the York University Undergraduate Calendar - [Grading Scheme for 2020-21](#)

Missed Tests/Midterm Exams/Late Assignment:

For any missed quiz or late assignment, students MUST complete the following online form which will be received and reviewed in the Psychology undergraduate office. At this time, due to COVID-19 an Attending Physician's Statement (APS) is NOT required, however, a reason for missing an evaluated component in the course must be provided.

[HH PSYC: Missed Tests/Exams Form](#). Failure to complete the form within 48 hours of the original deadline will result in a grade of zero for the missed quiz or late assignment.

If you miss one of the two term tests in this course, you will complete a short-answer only alternative test instead of the multiple-choice test you missed. This will be completed within 1 week of the original test you missed and there are no exceptions to this.

If you submit a written assignment after the deadline, you will be assigned a late penalty of 10% per day. The TA's and myself need these fixed deadlines in order to plan our own work schedules, and to ensure that you received timely feedback. Moreover, with the small group assignment, your classmates are counting on you postponing your projects on eClass on time in order to have the last bit of information they need in order to prepare for the test. Life gets hectic, but meeting deadlines is an important lesson to learn as a undergraduate student, regardless of whether you plan to pursue graduate school, or a different career.

Add/Drop Deadlines

For a list of all important dates please refer to: [Fall/Winter 2020-21 Important Dates](#)

	Fall (F)	Year (Y)	Winter (W)
Last date to add a course without permission of instructor (also see Financial Deadlines)	Sept 22.	Sept 22.	Jan. 25
Last date to add a course with permission of instructor (also see Financial Deadlines)	Oct. 6	Oct. 27	Feb. 8
Drop deadline: Last date to drop a course without receiving a grade (also see Financial Deadlines)	Nov. 6	Feb. 5	March 12
Course Withdrawal Period (withdraw from a course and receive a grade of "W" on transcript – see note below)	Nov. 7- Dec. 8	Feb. 6 – April 12	March 13- April 12

Add and Drop Deadline Information

There are deadlines for adding and dropping courses, both academic and financial. Since, for the most part, the dates are **different**, be sure to read the information carefully so that you understand the differences between the sessional dates below and the [Refund Tables](#).

You are strongly advised to pay close attention to the "Last date to enroll without permission of course instructor" deadlines. These deadlines represent the last date students have unrestricted access to the registration and enrolment system.

After that date, you must contact the professor/department offering the course to arrange permission.

You can drop courses using the registration and enrolment system up until the last date to drop a course without receiving a grade (drop deadline).

You may [withdraw from a course](#) using the registration and enrolment system after the drop deadline until the last day of class for the term associated with the course. When you withdraw from a course, the course remains on your transcript without a grade and is notated as 'W'. The withdrawal will not affect your grade point average or count towards the credits required for your degree.

Information on Plagiarism Detection

All written assignments will be submitted to Turnitin via eClass. Turnitin is software that detects plagiarism in a variety of forms. Please familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism and ensure that your assignment submissions are not in violation of these rules. These rules are clearly outlined in the Academic Integrity for Students Section of the syllabus below. If you have any questions about this, please email your TA or myself and we will be happy to answer them.

Electronic Device Policy

This course will be delivered in an online format and therefore electronic devices are obviously required for course-related purposes. However, it is expected that you will complete tests in a manner that DOES NOT require consulting an unauthorised source during an examination. The two term tests in this course are NOT to be considered open-book tests. You should be completing them just as you would were you sitting in the lecture hall with the TA's and myself. This means no other tabs open on your computer, no use of your cell phone or tablets, no texting with classmates, WhatsApp chats, etc. I take this very seriously, so please respect the rules, and complete these tests honestly, so that all students have a fair and level playing field.

Academic Integrity for Students

York University takes academic integrity very seriously; please familiarize yourself with [Information about the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty](#).

It is recommended that you review Academic Integrity by completing the [Academic Integrity Tutorial](#) and [Academic Honesty Quiz](#)

Test Banks

The offering for sale of, buying of, and attempting to sell or buy test banks (banks of test questions and/or answers), or any course specific test questions/answers is not permitted in

the Faculty of Health. Any student found to be doing this may be considered to have breached the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty. In particular, buying and attempting to sell banks of test questions and/or answers may be considered as “Cheating in an attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation” (article 2.1.1 from the Senate Policy) and/or “encouraging, enabling or causing others” (article 2.1.10 from the Senate Policy) to cheat.

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

While all individuals are expected to satisfy the requirements of their program of study and to aspire to do so at a level of excellence, the university recognizes that persons with disabilities may require reasonable accommodation to enable them to do so. The university encourages students with disabilities to register with **Student Accessibility Services (SAS)** to discuss their accommodation needs as early as possible in the term to establish the recommended academic accommodations that will be communicated to Course Directors as necessary. **Please let me know as early as possible in the term if you anticipate requiring academic accommodation so that we can discuss how to consider your accommodation needs within the context of this course.**

<https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/>

Excerpt from Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

1. Pursuant to its commitment to sustaining an inclusive, equitable community in which all members are treated with respect and dignity, and consistent with applicable accessibility legislation, York University shall make reasonable and appropriate accommodations in order to promote the ability of students with disabilities to fulfill the academic requirements of their programs. This policy aims to eliminate systemic barriers to participation in academic activities by students with disabilities.

All students are expected to satisfy the essential learning outcomes of courses. Accommodations shall be consistent with, support and preserve the academic integrity of the curriculum and the academic standards of courses and programs. For further information please refer to: [York University Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy](#).

Course Materials Copyright Information

These course materials are designed for use as part of the PSYC3560 course at York University and are the property of the instructor unless otherwise stated. Third party copyrighted materials (such as book chapters, journal articles, music, videos, etc.) have either been licensed for use in this course or fall under an exception or limitation in Canadian Copyright law.

Copying this material for distribution (e.g. uploading material to a commercial third-party website) may lead to a violation of Copyright law. [Intellectual Property Rights Statement](#).

Email Policy

When composing an email to me or to a teaching assistant, you should think carefully about the kind of impression you want to create. Most of you are likely eager to make a lasting, positive impression and to receive a favourable response. However, sending such an email may be new to you, so below are some helpful tips to review before sending an email.

1. Any emails sent to the professor or teaching assistant **MUST** indicate the course number and section in the subject line of the email. Our course and section are **PSYC3560, SEC M**.
2. Make sure to include your full name and student number in the body of the email. If your preferred name differs from the name listed on the course roster, please let your professor and TA know that early in the term.
3. Before sending an email, make sure you've done a thorough job of trying to find the answer to your question in the course materials posted to eClass. That means carefully reading through the course syllabus and other pieces of information posted on eClass to see if the answer is already provided. The professor and TA's receive a high volume of email and will not respond to emails asking questions that are clearly addressed in the posted course materials.
4. A proper email to your professor or TA begins by properly addressing them by their full name and/or title. In this case, you should refer to me as either Dr. Fortune or Professor Fortune. You can address your emails to your TA's by their full names. The body of your email message should be proofread for spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors, and should be written in a polite tone. Respect goes both ways, and you should treat your professor and TA's with the same respect with which you would like to be treated.
5. Send your emails well in advance of when a response is required. While the volume of emails received will vary throughout the year, you should expect to receive a response with 3 days of sending an email. If you have not received a response within that time period, you can follow-up politely.

Discussion Board Etiquette

One of the aspects of this course that I'm most excited about are the discussion board posts, which will allow you to share your thoughts, feelings, and questions about interesting aspects of the course with one another. However, this only works when everyone understands some general rules around appropriate behaviour on these boards. They must be a safe space for everyone, and the TA's and myself will ensure that they remain so. Read through the guidelines below, to familiarize yourself with our expectations around discussion board behaviour.

- **Respect others.** It is important to remember that you, your peers, and the teaching team are real people who are affected by what you write. It is important to be mindful of the feelings and opinions of others, even if they differ from your own. As a general rule of thumb: If you wouldn't say it to someone's face, don't say it online either.
- **Proofread.** Before sending an email, sending a message to a chat or responding to a discussion, review your response to ensure that it is clear, concise and respectful.

- **Avoid strong language, all caps, and excessive exclamation points.** It is very easy for written text to be misread and misunderstood. Have you ever sent a text or email message with good intent, but your peer or other recipient thought you were being rude or condescending? If so, then you have experienced this firsthand. By being aware of strong language, you can identify and avoid potential confusions before sending messages.
- **Avoid slang, use proper English.** Avoid slang terms such as “wassup?” and texting abbreviations such as “u” instead of “you.”
- **Be careful with emoticons.** Limit and possibly avoid the use of emoticons.
- **Pick the right tone, be careful with humour or sarcasm.** Since your communication will be in a written format then it is very important to choose the right words when you are trying to get your meaning across. Be cautious when using humour or sarcasm as tone is often lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or sound offensive. Do not assume everyone understands where you are coming from or knows Internet slang for sarcasm (e.g., /s).
- **Personal information and confidentiality.** Do not post confidential information about yourself or others in the discussion boards. You are, of course, free to share some personal anecdotes about your life if they are relevant to the question being posed, but keep in mind that the board is viewed by your classmates and potentially others.
- **Don’t post or share, publicly or privately, inappropriate material.** Posting or sharing this type of information will go against the code of conduct expected of students at this university.
- **Be forgiving.** Be mindful that for many students this will be a new way of interacting and that some may struggle with written communication. Be kind, patient, and understanding with your peers as they become familiar and comfortable with the new format and the guidelines.

Course Schedule

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNED READINGS
JAN 15	Death education & the changing nature of death and dying	Chapter 1 (pgs. 1-14), Chapter 2 (pgs. 21-42)
JAN 22	Attitudes toward death, death anxiety, language around death, death in the media	Chapter 3 (pgs. 45-63) & Chapter 4 (pgs. 88-95)
JAN 29	Developmental Perspectives: how children and adolescents learn about death	Chapter 12 (pgs. 329-336) & Chapters 13 (pgs. 368-374)
FEB 5	Living with Life-Threatening Illness & Caring for the sick and dying, hospice and palliative care	Chapter 6 (pgs. 131-152) & Chapter 7 (pgs. 160-176)
FEB 12	Making the tough decisions: How medical professionals, families, and the dying communicate about options at the end of life. Death in the Arts Assignment Due!	Chapter 16 (pgs. 445-476)
FEB 19	READING WEEK BREAK	

FEB 26	TEST 1	Covers chapters and lectures from Jan 15 to Feb 12
MAR 5	Understanding grief: dominant models of grief and coping, a critical look at stage-models of grief, how their intuitive appeal can exacerbate grieving	Chapter 9 (pgs. 212-255)
MAR 12	How children and adolescents cope with death of a loved one & the experiences of children and adolescents living with life-threatening illnesses. Lossography Assignment due!	Chapter 12 (pgs. 337-355) and Chapter 13 (pgs. 375-388)
MAR 19	How adults experience death of a friend, spouse, child, or parent. The experience of disenfranchised grief in the case of parental loss or childbearing loss.	Chapter 14 (pgs. 400-416) and Chapter 15 (pgs. 422-439)
MAR 26	The unique challenges associated with death by suicide. We'll discuss complicated grieving processes, and the social stigma of suicide. Small Group Projects due!	Chapter 17 (pgs. 484-508)
APR 2	Religious and Cultural Views on Death: how people around the world view death, their death rituals & beliefs about what happens after death. Making meaning out of death and loss, post-traumatic growth.	Small group projects posted to eClass module. Readings posted to eClass. No textbook Chapter readings assigned.
APR 9	TEST 2	Covers chapters and lectures since Test 1