

PSYC 424 - Research into spontaneous thought

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Fall 2025; 3.0 credits

Learning Hours: 3 hours each week

In Person

1.0 Land Acknowledgment

I will begin this syllabus by acknowledging that Queen's is situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory. We are grateful to be able to live, learn and teach on these lands. Acknowledging this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. It is also to acknowledge this territory's significance for the Indigenous Peoples who lived, and continue to live, upon it and whose practices and spiritualities are tied to the land and continue to develop in relationship to the territory and its other inhabitants today. Indigenous communities in Kingston/Katarokwi continue to reflect the area's Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee roots. There is also a significant Métis community and First Peoples from other Nations across Turtle Island present here today. To read more about the history of the land, see the Queen's Encyclopedia and to learn more about land acknowledgements, see the Office of Indigenous Initiatives.

2.0 Diversity and Inclusion

In this class, it is my goal to ensure that students from all backgrounds have a great learning experience, and that everyone feels valued, respected, and welcome. The class will represent a diversity of individuals, identities, beliefs, backgrounds and experiences. The diversity of experiences that the students bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit, and your contribution in our seminar will benefit everyone. **With this in mind, please speak up and participate during class meetings by sharing your opinions and questions about the course, however, please do so with respect for other members of the class.** I will promote an anti-discriminatory, anti-racist, and accountable environment where everyone feels welcome. University is a place to share, question, and challenge ideas. Each student brings a different set of lived experiences. You can help to create a safer, more respectful classroom community for learners by following these guidelines:

- Make a personal commitment to learn about, understand, and support your peers.
- Assume the best of others and expect the best of them.
- Recognize and value the experiences, abilities, and knowledge each person brings to the course.
- Acknowledge the impact of oppression on other people's lives and make sure your words and tone are respectful and inclusive.
- Encourage others to develop and share their ideas.
- Pay close attention to what your peers say/write before you respond. Think through and re-read what you have written before you post online or send your comments to others.
- Be open to having your ideas challenged and challenge others with the intent of facilitating growth.
- Look for opportunities to agree with one another, building on and intentionally referencing peers' thoughts and ideas; disagree with ideas without making personal attacks, demeaning, or embarrassing others.

Name/Pronoun

If your preferred name does not appear correctly onQ and/or on class lists, please follow these steps. You may also use this process to add your pronouns to the appearance of your name.

1. Log into SOLUS.
2. Click on Personal Information tab.
3. Click on the Names tab
4. Click on the Add New Name tab
5. Choose Preferred from the Name Type drop down menu
6. Enter the name you would like to appear in onQ and/or on class lists.
7. Click Save.

Please allow 24 to 48 hours for your name to be registered within the system. If you have further questions or concerns, please contact ITS at Queen's University.

3.0 Course Description / Welcome

Hi and welcome to Research in Spontaneous Thought seminar! PSYC 424 intended to be an in-depth study of how to approach the study of ongoing thought patterns in psychology and cognitive neuroscience. We will understand how people measure ongoing thought patterns, and their application to other cognitive measures. We will read and discuss articles that consider why these are important, how they are linked to the brain and explore how these phenomena are understood in both contemporary psychological and neuroscience research. The course aims to highlight the conceptual challenges that complex naturally occurring patterns of thoughts pose for scientists, and consider the problems faced when attempting to integrate research in this area across psychological and neural levels of analysis.

To take full advantage of this class, it is important that you plan your workload. Key dates (first day of class, tuition due date, last day to add/drop courses) are important to this goal as these help you plan your studies properly. Please find them at [Important Dates](#).

Expectations

In this class I hope to help you be able to understand how to study ongoing thought patterns and how this can help us understand flexible and adaptive behaviour. Don't worry if this seems complicated – this course is designed so that if you follow the course material you will gain a general understanding of how contemporary researchers think about this important subject of human cognition. My goal is for you to feel comfortable exploring new topics and offering your perspective, so you are expected to have read the assigned papers and participate in class discussions.

4.0 Learning Objectives

To complete this course students will demonstrate their ability to:

- Summarize current theories of ongoing thought patterns and how they relate to both contemporary aspects of cognitive processing including attention, learning and memory, as well as to issues in cognitive neuroscience.
- Critically evaluate current, experimental literature in the field
- Develop oral and presentation skills.
- Develop writings skills.
- Summarize and communicate research findings in this research domain
- Generate new research questions regarding ongoing thoughts

5.0 Course Materials & Technologies

There is a moderate amount of reading that is required in this course. You are expected to read the articles before coming to class so that you can contribute to the discussions. You do not need to purchase any textbooks or papers for this course. These papers are available as PDFs on OnQ under *Content* and are also accessible through Queen's Omni library in which you can use your NetID credentials to access.

READING LIST / CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1. Introduction to the class

Tuesday. Introduction. No Reading Required

Thursday. Smallwood, J., and Schooler, J.W. "The science of mind wandering: empirically navigating the stream of consciousness." *Annual review of psychology* 66(2015): 487-518.

Discussion Question: Can different patterns of ongoing thought be linked to a single unique process?

Week 2. Definitional complexity

Tuesday. Seli, P., Kane, M. J., Smallwood, J., Schacter, D. L., Maillet, D., Schooler, J. W., & Smilek, D. (2018). Mind-wandering as a natural kind: A family-resemblances view. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 22(6), 479-490.

Christoff, K., Mills, C., Andrews-Hanna, J. R., Irving, Z. C., Thompson, E., Fox, K. C., & Kam, J. W. (2018). Mind-wandering as a scientific concept: cutting through the definitional haze. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 22(11), 957-959.

Thursday. Christoff, K., Irving, Z.C., Fox, K.C.R., Spreng, R.N., Andrews-Hanna, J.R. (2016). Mind-wandering as spontaneous thought: a dynamic framework. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 17, 718-730, doi:10.1038/nrn.2016.113

Discussion Question: What are the pros and cons for a definition of different features of ongoing thought?

Week 3. Relationship to conscious experience

Tuesday. Smallwood, J. et al., (2021). The neural correlates of ongoing thought. *IScience*, 24. doi.org/10.1016/j.isci. 2021.102132

Thursday. Gonzalez-Castillo, J., Kam, J.Y., Hoy, C.W., Bandettini, P.A. (2021). How to interpret resting-state fMRI: Ask your participants., *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 10, 41(6): 1130-1141.

Discussion Question: What are the advantages for our understanding of brain function that we can gain from experience sampling?

Week 4. Executive control

Tuesday. Executive failure: McVay, J. C., & Kane, M. J. (2010). Does mind wandering reflect executive function or executive failure? Comment on Smallwood and Schooler (2006) and Watkins (2008).

Response: Smallwood, J. (2010). Why the global availability of mind wandering necessitates resource competition: reply to McVay and Kane (2010).

Thursday. Turnbull, A., Wang, H. T., Murphy, C., Ho, N. S. P., Wang, X., Sormaz, M., ... & Vatansever, D. (2019). Left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex supports context-dependent prioritization of off-task thought. *Nature communications*, 10(1), 1-10.

Discussion Question: Consider the evidence for an against the notion that mind-wandering states are a lapse in attention?

Week 5. Association with creativity

Tuesday. *National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Class Cancelled.*

Thursday. Gable, S. L., Hopper, E. A., & Schooler, J. W. (2019). When the muses strike: Creative ideas of physicists and writers routinely occur during mind wandering. *Psychological science*, 30(3), 396-404.

Discussion question: What are some of the similarities between creativity and certain patterns of ongoing thought?

Week 6 - Student presentations of their selected papers

No required reading

Discussion Question: *One of the topics covered by another student*

Week 7. Dreaming

Tuesday. Horikawa, T., Tamaki, M., Miyawaki, Y. & Kamitani, Y. (2013). Neural decoding of visual imagery during sleep. *Science*, 340, 639-642. DOI: 10.1126/science.1234330

Thursday. Siclari, F, Baird, B, Perogamvros, L., Bernardi, G., LaRocque, J.L., Riedner, B., Boly, M., Postle, B.R., Tononi, G. (2017). The neural correlates of dreaming. *Nature Neuroscience*, 20, 6, 872-878.

Discussion Question: What are the similarities between waking and dreaming thought?

**Draft due Friday, October 24th at 11:59 pm*

Week 8 – Ongoing Thoughts across Contexts

Tuesday. Ho, N. S. P., Poerio, G., Konu, D., Turnbull, A., Sormaz, M., Leech, R., ... & Smallwood, J. (2020). Facing up to the wandering mind: Patterns of off-task laboratory thought are associated with stronger neural recruitment of right fusiform cortex while processing facial stimuli. *NeuroImage*, 116765.

Thursday. Chitiz, L., Mckeown, B., Mulholland, B., Wallace, R., Goodall-Halliwell, I., Ping-Ho, N. S., Konu, D., Poerio, G. L., Wammes, J., Milham, M., Klein, A., Jefferies, E., Leech, R., & Smallwood, J. (2025). Mapping cognition across lab and daily life using Experience-Sampling. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 131, Article 103853. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2025.103853>

Discussion Question: How can studies of experience sampling inform our understanding of thinking across contexts?

Week 9. Ongoing thoughts in daily life

Tuesday. Mulholland, B., Goodall-Halliwel, I., Wallace, R., Chitiz, L., Mckeown, B., Rastan, A., Poerio, G. L., Leech, R., Turnbull, A., Klein, A., Milham, M., Wammes, J. D., Jefferies, E., & Smallwood, J. (2023). Patterns of ongoing thought in the real world. *Consciousness and cognition*, 114, 103530. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2023.103530>

Thursday. Wallace, Raven S., Hardikar, S., Mulholland, B., (...) & Smallwood, J. (2025) The impact of the weekly cycle on conscious experience in daily life. *Scientific Reports*.

Discussion Question: How can studies of experience sampling inform our understanding of thinking in daily life

Week 10. Neural Correlates of Thought Patterns

Tuesday. Wallace Raven S, Mckeown Brontë, Goodall-Halliwel Ian, Chitiz Louis, (...) & , Smallwood Jonathan (2024). Mapping patterns of thought onto brain activity during movie-watching. *eLife* 13:RP9773. <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.97731.3>

Thursday. Mckeown, B., Goodall-Halliwel, I., Wallace, R.S., Chitiz, L., (...) & Smallwood, J. (2024). Self-reports map the landscape of task states derived from brain imaging. *Communications Psychology*

Discussion Question: How might experience sampling contribute to our understanding of neural functions?

Week 11. Personality & Individual Differences

Tuesday. Hardikar, S., Mckeown, B., Turnbull, A. *et al.* Personality traits vary in their association with brain activity across situations. *Commun Biol* 7, 1498 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-024-07061-0>

Thursday. Mulholland, B., Chitiz, L., Wallace, R., McKeown, B., Milham, M., Klein, A., Leech, R., Jefferies, E., Poerio, G., Wammes, J., Stewart, J., Hardikar, S., & Smallwood, J. (2025). Patterns of ongoing thought in the real world and their links to mental health and well-being. *PLOS Mental Health*, 2(8), e0000309. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmen.0000309>

Discussion Question: Consider some of the different features of ongoing thought that have links to individual differences, such as health and well being?

Week 12. Student Research Proposal Presentations

No Required Reading

Discussion Question: *One of the topics covered by another student*

Copyright of Course Material

Course materials created by the course instructor, including all slides, presentations, handouts, tests, exams, and other similar course materials, are the intellectual property of the instructor. It is a departure from academic integrity to distribute, publicly post, sell or otherwise disseminate an instructor's course materials or to provide an instructor's course materials to anyone else for distribution, posting, sale or other means of dissemination, without the instructor's express consent. A student who engages in such conduct may be subject to penalty for a departure from academic

integrity and may also face adverse legal consequences for infringement of intellectual property rights.

6.0 Assignments and Grading Breakdown

The grades for this class will be based on a combination of class participation, low stakes weekly exercises, class presentations and a single piece of written course work.

a. Class Participation (20 X 1 = 20%)

Seminar classes are designed for discussion so there is a substantial participation component to your grade. It's a small group, so these will largely feel like conversations. Feel free to bring a coffee or tea. I expect students to attend all of the classes if possible as this will ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the broader topic. However, students can miss up to four classes (2 weeks worth of classes) without penalty, if I am contacted in advance of the meeting. Participation will be assessed based on:

- Attendance
- Engagement and discussion (asking questions, reference to readings, extension to other topics/related readings)

b. Discussion Board Posts (10 x 1 = 10% total)

Each class you will have the opportunity to write a comment on the class discussion board outlining your thoughts on each paper, based on the readings for that week. **You will need to complete 10 of these over the course of the class to get full credit.** There is a great deal of flexibility in what you can focus on. The syllabus suggests Discussion Questions you can focus on for each week, but you can also highlight something that you thought was good about one or other or the papers that we read, a parallel between a paper and one from a prior week. I highly encourage you to use your own thoughts, words, and ideas as there are no right or wrong answers. Discussion posts are due at the end of each week, on Friday at 5pm EST.

Grading breakdown:

- Minimum 3 sentences = 50%
- Uses relevant references (APA style) = 25%
- Unique contribution (offers a critique, insight, propagates discussion, etc) = 25%

c. Class Presentations (15 x 2 = 30%)

In this course you will make two presentations each worth 15% of your final grade. In Week 6 each of you will be responsible for a 5-minute presentation on one paper that is relevant to the topic but is not covered. In the final week of class (Week 12) each of you will give a five-minute presentation on your research proposal (see below). In your presentations, the goal is to communicate the findings of the article or the aim of your proposal in a clear and engaging manner. You don't need to produce a power point presentation, although often this can help you give a clearer more timely presentation. You will be graded on both the presentation and the extent to which you led the discussion in a way that encouraged thoughtful participation. Also, in both talks you will be penalised if you run over by more than 10% so make sure you practice your talk.

d. Final Paper (submission of an acceptable first draft on time = 10%, final paper grade = 30%, Total = 40%).

A 1-page research proposal is due at the end of term. This will propose an experiment to examine a question on a topic of your choice relevant to the class. This will follow an NSERC research grant proposal (as required by MA or PhD scholarship applications) and is designed to help you develop an idea and get some practice and feedback writing a grant. So, you will be submitting a first draft of

the paper and feedback will be provided. More detailed information will follow in class. **This should include references formatted in the APA style.** References are not included in the word limit.

First Draft Due: Friday of Week 7 (**October 24th**) at 11:59 pm.

Final Paper Due: Friday of Week 11 (**December 5th**) at 11:59 pm.

There is no midterm exam or final exam for this class.

Assignment Submission Policy - Grace Period

Each assignment will have a three-day grace period; your assignments are due on the due date posted but will be accepted, without penalty, up to 72 hours afterwards. Late penalties will apply to submissions after this grace period of 10% per day up to 5 days. Short term academic consideration is therefore built into all due dates and will not be extended past this 3-day grace period for students without long-term academic consideration or accommodations for disabilities. To be clear, the 3-day grace period will count towards your draft submission and final paper. The 3-day grace period *does not* apply to your discussion posts or the 5-minute presentations, as you will present these in class.

That being said, please reach out to me if there are extenuating circumstances in your life. I am more than willing to accommodate an extension in advance of the due date for assignments.

Overall Grade Composition

Weekly Participation	20%
Discussion Board comments	10%
Presentations	30%
Research proposal Draft	10%
Final Research paper	30%
Total	100%

Grading Scheme and Grading Method

All components of this course will receive numerical percentage marks. The final grade you receive for the course will be derived by converting your numerical course average to a letter grade according to Queen's Official Grade Conversion Scale:

Queen's Official Grade Conversion Scale

Grade	Numerical Course Average (Range)
A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
C+	67-69
C	63-66
C-	60-62
D+	57-59
D	53-56
D-	50-52
F	49 and below

7.0 Policies

Suggested Time Commitment

In this course, you should expect to invest on average 8 to 10 hours per week. This will include the time you spend in class or lab/tutorial, studying course material, and completing weekly homework or preparing for your larger assignments and exams. You are encouraged to use a term at a glance and a weekly study schedule (visit [SASS](#)) that distributes the 8-10 hours per week and avoid 'cramming'. This way you will be more likely to complete the course successfully and remember what you learned longer.

Class Attendance

Your presence and participation in class contributes to the knowledge and skills that you will develop throughout this course. I expect that you attend class regularly, participate in class conversations and learning activities. These types of activities provide active engagement, promote a deeper understanding of the course content, and contribute to your success in this course.

Questions about the Course and Contacting the Teaching Team

Address for contacting the teaching team: raven.wallace@queensu.ca

Course Announcements

All course announcements will be made on the on-Q site associated with the class and via email to the class.

Academic Support

All undergraduate students face new learning and writing challenges as they progress through university: essays and reports become more complex; effectively incorporating research into writing becomes more important; the types of assignments become more diverse; managing your time and developing the skills you need to read and think critically gets more challenging. I encourage students to contact Student Academic Success Services (SASS). SASS offers many different ways to receive support:

- Free online or in-person [appointments](#) to get personalized support on writing and academic skills from expert staff and trained peers.
- [Workshops](#) and [drop-in programs](#). SASS' [Events Calendar lists events coming soon](#).
- [Online resources](#) that provide strategies for academic skills and writing development at university.
- If English is not your first language, SASS has specific resources for [English as Additional Language students](#), including weekly programs and EAL academic skills appointments. You can meet on an ongoing basis with an EAL consultant to work on your academic writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Queen's University is committed to working with students with disabilities to remove barriers to their academic goals. Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS), students with disabilities, instructors, and faculty staff work together to provide and implement academic accommodations designed to allow students with disabilities equitable access to all course material (including in-class as well as exams). If you are a student currently experiencing barriers to your academics due to disability related reasons, and you would like to understand whether academic accommodations could support the removal of those barriers, please visit the [QSAS website](#) to learn more about academic accommodations or start the registration process with QSAS by clicking **Access Ventus** button at [Ventus | Accessibility Services | Queen's \(queensu.ca\)](#)

VENTUS is an online portal that connects students, instructors, Queen's Student Accessibility Services, the Exam's Office and other support services in the process to request, assess, and implement academic accommodations.

To learn more go to: <https://www.queensu.ca/ventus-support/students/visual-guide-ventus-students>

Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances

Academic Consideration is a process for the University community to provide a compassionate response to assist students experiencing unforeseen, short-term extenuating circumstances that may impact or impede a student's ability to complete their academics. This may include but is not limited to any extenuating circumstance (illness, bereavement, traumatic event, injury, family emergency, etc.) which is short-lived, begins within the term, and will not last longer than 12 weeks - see [Academic Consideration](#) webpage for details
(<https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/undergraduate/student-services/academic-consideration>)

Each Faculty has developed a protocol to provide a consistent and equitable approach in dealing with requests for academic consideration for students facing extenuating circumstances. For more information, undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences should consult the Faculty's webpage on [Academic Consideration in Extenuating Circumstances](#) and submit a request via the [Academic Consideration Request Portal](#). Students in other Faculties and Schools who are enrolled in this course should refer to the protocol for their home Faculty.

Students are encouraged to submit requests as soon as the need becomes apparent and to contact their instructor and/or course coordinator as soon as possible once academic consideration has been granted. Any delay in contact may limit the options available for academic consideration. While we encourage instructors to accommodate, each instructor has discretion in deciding whether or how to apply the Academic Consideration. For more information on the Academic Consideration process, what is and is not an extenuating circumstance, and to submit an Academic Consideration request, please see the Faculty of Arts and Science's [Academic Consideration website](#). ASO courses include links to information on **Academic Consideration** on your **Course Homepage** in onQ.

Please see the Teaching Team page for contact information for your instructor and TA(s), where relevant.

For more information, please see the [Senate Policy on Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances](#).

Queen's Policy Statement on Academic Integrity

Queen's University is dedicated to creating a scholarly community free to explore a range of ideas, to build and advance knowledge and to share the ideas and knowledge that emerge from a range of intellectual pursuits. Each core value of academic integrity, as defined in the [Senate Academic Integrity Policy](#), gives rise to and supports the next.

Honesty appears in presenting one's own academic work, whether in the context of an examination, written assignment, laboratory or seminar presentation. It is in researching one's own work for course assignments, acknowledging dependence on the ideas or words of another and in distinguishing one's own ideas and thoughts from other sources. It is also present in faithfully

reporting laboratory results even when they do not conform to an original hypothesis. Further, honesty is present in truthfully communicating in written and/or oral exchanges with instructors, peers and other individuals (e.g. teaching assistants, proctors, university staff and/or university administrators).

Trust exists in an environment in which one's own ideas can be expressed without fear of ridicule or fear that someone else will take credit for them.

Fairness appears in the proper and full acknowledgement of the contributions of collaborators in group projects and in the full participation of partners in collaborative projects.

Respect, in a general sense, is part of an intellectual community that recognizes the participatory nature of the learning process and honours and respects a wide range of opinions and ideas. However, "respect" appears in a very particular sense when students attend class, pay attention, contribute to discussion and submit papers on time; instructors "show respect by taking students' ideas seriously, by recognizing them as individuals, helping them develop their ideas, providing full and honest feedback on their work, and valuing their perspectives and their goals" ("[The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity](#)", 3rd Edition, p. 8).

Ultimately, responsibility is both personal and collective and engages students, administrators, faculty and staff in creating and maintaining a learning environment supported by and supporting academic integrity.

Courage differs from the preceding values by being more a quality or capacity of character – "the capacity to act in accordance with one's values despite fear" ("[The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity](#)", 3rd edition, p. 10). Courage is displayed by students who make choices and integrous decisions that are followed by action, even in the face of peer pressure to cheat, copy another's material, provide their own work to others to facilitate cheating, or otherwise represent themselves dishonestly. Students also display courage by acknowledging prior wrongdoing and taking proactive measures to rectify any associated negative impact.

All of these values are not merely abstract but are expressed in and reinforced by the University's policies and practices.

Syllabus statements for Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

- **Permitted in specific assignments, with citation**
 - Students must submit their own work and cite the work that is not theirs. Generative AI writing tools such as ChatGPT are only permissible when explicitly noted in the assignment instructions, such as for assisting with discussion board prompts. In these cases, be sure to cite the material that they generate. Any other use constitutes a departure from academic integrity. *I highly encourage you to use your own thoughts, ideas, and words over Generative AI writing tools for your written assignments, such as the draft proposal and final assignment.*

Queen's [Student Academic Success Services](#) (SASS) offers a self-directed, online academic integrity module which we encourage all students to take which will help with:

- Understanding the nature of the academic integrity departure
- Understanding the expectations of and role of sources in scholarly writing
- Integrating sources into your writing (paraphrasing, quoting, summarizing)

- Understanding when and how to cite your sources
- Managing your time effectively to avoid the need for shortcuts
- Taking effective notes to ensure accuracy of source material and correct attribution

Turnitin Statement

This course makes use of Turnitin, a third-party application that helps maintain standards of excellence in academic integrity. Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments through onQ to Turnitin. In doing so, students' work will be included as source documents in the Turnitin reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarized text in this course. Data from submissions is also collected and analyzed by Turnitin for detecting Artificial Intelligence ([AI-generated text](#)). These results are not reported to your instructor at this time but could be in the future.

Turnitin is a suite of tools that provide instructors with information about the authenticity of submitted work and facilitates the process of grading. The similarity report generated after an assignment file is submitted produces a similarity score for each assignment. A similarity score is the percentage of writing that is similar to content found on the internet or the Turnitin extensive database of content. Turnitin does not determine if an instance of plagiarism has occurred. Instead, it gives instructors the information they need to determine the authenticity of work as a part of a larger process.

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Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoy this class.