

Film Sound

Last Updated: Sat, 01/03/2026

Course prefix: LMC

Course number: 3253

Section: B

CRN (you may add up to five):
35297

Instructor First Name: Kristi

Instructor Last Name: McKim

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

"The ear goes more toward the within, the eye toward the outer," claims French filmmaker Robert Bresson, renowned for his sophisticated cinematic soundscapes. Though we commonly speak of *seeing* films, we less often talk about *hearing* them. Listening is something we *do* more than *practice*, and this Film Sound course helps us hear the movies by attuning our senses to cinema's fuller acoustic richness. Through listening to films and mapping sound patterns, exceptions, and exemplars, this class combines the history of film sound (as dialogue, voice, music, effects, and silence) with theories of how and why sound moves us and makes meanings, within films by prominent sound-focused filmmakers (such as Bresson, Jane Campion, the Coen brothers, Alfonso Cuarón, Michael Haneke, Spike Lee, Terrence Malick, Jordan Peele, Kelly Reichardt, Martin Scorsese) and examples from a variety of films such as *M*, *Le Million*, *Modern Times*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Playtime*, *Star Wars*, *Blue*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Lives of Others*, *Arrival*, *45 Years*, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Passing*, *Drive My Car*, *Memoria*, *Zone of Interest*. In addition to written assessments and experiential projects (e.g., sound walks), students will create projects that remix, transform, and expand film history.

Course learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Attend to the nuances of film soundtracks by listening with acuity
- Describe what they hear within vivid, precise, and accurate terminology of dialogue, effects, music, silence
- Create arguments about how film sound amplifies audiovisual complexity, through close analysis of the soundtrack

- Grasp the history of film sound, in terms of technological advances and changes in acoustic media
- Situate film soundtracks within basic theoretical foundations about how sound (voice, dialogue, music, effects, silence) works in film
- Consider how film sound functions in relation to everyday sound and acoustic experience
- Appreciate the complexity of histories and theories of film sound (insofar as this course is a gateway and not an exhaustive means to an end)
- Reflect on how their individual patterns of attention compare with those of peers, film artists, and film scholars
- Create original claims and new work—written and multimodal—that remix and build upon existing film history

Required course materials:

Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision*

Essays, videos, and readings (linked in syllabus and/or uploaded to Canvas)

Grading policy:

Classroom Engagement (10%): This advanced class expects your prepared, thoughtful, and respectful participation. Your discussion contributions need to reflect your careful reading, screening, and thinking about class materials. Engagement doesn't mean simply *talking* but also *listening*, responding to, and asking questions of your colleagues and professor. Substantive participation involves respect for each other's ideas alongside careful attention to the assigned texts/films. Your classroom engagement should demonstrate:

- Careful reading of texts and screening of films before coming to class (unless otherwise indicated in the syllabus);
- Preparedness to be an involved discussant and engaged listener (not a spectator);
- Active thinking about questions and issues raised during class;
- Courage in trying out your own ideas, exercising vulnerability, and asking for help;
- Respect for the ideas and worth of others in the discussion; and
- Effort and thoughtfulness on any written exercises assigned to prepare you for discussion.

Discussion Posts (25%): These assignments (i.e. introducing yourselves, participating in a sound walk, isolating a scene for close listening, remixing a scene with a new soundtrack, etc.) extend and enrich our in-person class discussion, as indicated in the syllabus. Your lowest grade will be dropped (you can either skip one or have a second chance to improve a lower grade). Writing all posts will favorably factor into your engagement grade. Given the timely nature of these posts, late submissions will not be accepted (the whole point of this assignment is helping you to keep up with the course and to maintain engagement

with your peers), and a missed post will simply be recorded as a “zero” and will be the one that you drop.

Essay (17%): This assignment asks you to braid together the texts of our course with our in-person discussion and engagement. You will have a choice of several prompts, which will be introduced in more detail during class.

Group Presentation (8%): This assignment creates camaraderie among students while introducing students to films beyond those featured on our syllabus.

Quizzes (30%): These in-class handwritten quizzes will assess your comprehension of and engagement with course texts. Three quizzes will be given, but only your two highest grades will count.

Final Project (10%): This media project—and accompanying artistic statement/rationale—represents your culminating work in the course. This project will be phased into our semester via in-class exercises, to help you give shape to your work.

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

- A 90-100%
- B 80-89%
- C 70-79%
- D 60-69%
- F 0-59%

Attendance policy:

This class expects that you will be present for our meetings. Absences for religious holidays and observances, Georgia Tech athletic competitions (for athletes), illness, and sanctioned school functions will be excused (with notice). You can achieve the objectives of this course only through regular, responsible attendance and active engagement during our meetings. Students who miss more than three classes without documentation of illness or family emergency will see a lowered final grade, and students who miss more than six classes for any reason will fail the course. Students who are absent do not have the option of accessing a recorded class or participating remotely.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Humanities area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence