Term Project: Step 1
Groups, Research Questions, and the Draft Sketch

1) Form groups around research questions relating to a topic in phonetics. You will have to figure out who else is in the class, and find people with whom you might have common interests. Common interests could be a common language of interest, or it could be topical (e.g. interests in second language learning). Begin discussing possible topics, and be open minded. Interesting phonetic topics come in many varieties.

Here are a few suggestions:

A. Try to figure out some aspect of the acoustic (or articulatory) manifestation of a funny contrast. Note that 'funny' does not preclude familiar. Example: voiced and voiceless stops in English. Varieties of this topic would take into account differences in the manifestation of a contrast in different syllable positions or in different prosodic locations, or examine the effect of focus on a contrast, or its manifestation in different dialects.

B. The topics in A can be applied to the manifestation of a single sound as well, if there’s some idea as to how variation in a single sound might say something interesting. Example: tense mid vowels in English and the manifestation of diphthongization. Are these things diphthongs or monophthongs? You can ask questions as to how such phonetic events vary with respect to factors such as region or social context, or in different consonantal environments.

C. Investigate a phonological rule to see if speakers really behave that way, and see how the rule might be sensitive to various prosodic or pragmatic factors. Example: word-final devoicing in German. One course project back in the late seventies on this topic turned into a research program which is still being pursued today up at SUNY Buffalo.

D. There are a host of questions related to second language learning. Example: how Korean speakers deal with word-final stop contrasts. Or how Japanese speakers deal with rising pitch accents in questions.

Consult previous work on the subject, if available, since this often will seed some new ideas much quicker than having to find them from scratch.

Once you have discussed this and find a group of three or so that have some common ideas, formulate a Draft Sketch, laying out what linguistic structures you are going to look at and why. Email the Sketch to both instructors and each proposed member of the group sometime before January 29th.

Draft Sketch = one-paragraph descriptions of at least three projects which are at least potentially feasible. At the top, include a list of the proposed group members.