

Physics 496: Communicating in Physics—Writing Papers and Giving Talks
Spring 2026

Meets 2:00–4:50 p.m. Fridays, 158 Loomis

Semester at a Glance

Writing Workshop is held most week; be sure to bring your laptop to class.
In-Class Activities require your presence and *active* participation
Homework Assignments are typically due by 11:59 pm on the due date unless otherwise noted. Presentation slides are due by NOON on the due date.
Class attendance is mandatory.

Schedule is subject to change; changes will be posted to the [course website](#).
Questions about the schedule should be directed to Jessica Raley.

Week 1 January 23—first day of class

Course introduction (JLR)

Communicating in science—“The Up Goer Five” (JLR)

The importance of a title (JLR)

How to read a physics paper (SV)

No homework due today

Week 2 January 30

Introduction to Writing Workshop—rationale and goals (JLR)

WW #1—“Finding the Right Word” (JLR)

How to write an abstract (SV)

Writing an abstract (SV)

Tips for giving a good talk (JLR)

HW #1—“Active Reading for Physics Papers”

Week 3 February 6

Assign “Explaining Physics Concepts” teams

HW #2—“Best Practices for Oral Presentations” (short talk presented in class;
slides due by NOON on Friday)

Week 4 February 13

How to get started if you hate to write (JLR)

How to evaluate a scientific talk or colloquium (SV)

Literature search group activity (JLR)
WW #2—“Using the Right Word” (JLR)
HW #3—“Title and Abstract”

Week 5 February 20

WW #3: “Four-Letter Words in Science Writing” (JLR)
Collaborative writing (SV)
Revising and editing your work (SV)
HW #4—Explaining Physics—Draft

Week 6 February 27

WW #4: “Ambiguous Pronouns” (JLR)
Guest speaker—Professor Lance Cooper, “How to Pick a Graduate School”
2:00 p.m. TENTATIVE
The scientific publication process and peer review (SV)
HW #5—“Explaining Physics”—FINAL VERSION

Week 7 March 6

How to write instructions (JLR)
Writing Instructions—group activity (JLR)
Effective figures and figure captions (SV)
Technical Writing 101 (Review the handout prior to class!)
HW #6—“Peer Review”

Week 8 March 13

WW #5: “*Them Thar* Indirect Openings” (JRL)
Writing a statement of purpose (SV)
Making verbs work (JLR)
HW #7 Evaluating Figures and Captions
Colloquium Report #1 Due

Week 9 March 20 NO CLASS

Spring Break

Week 10 March 27

WW #6: “The Three-Preposition Rule (3PR)” (JLR)
A framework for ethical decisions (JLR)
Hard problems—ethical case studies team activity
Read before class “Ethics in Physics: The Need for Culture Change”
HW #8—Short Science Talk—Draft

Week 11 April 3

Scientific posters (SV)

Rules for writing numbers (Review the handout prior to class)

HW #9—Short Science Talk—In Class Presentation (Parallel Sessions in Room 158 & Room 236)

Week 12 April 10

WW #7: “Making Verbs Work” (JLR)

Reference rules and styles in scientific writing (JLR)

What to reference, why, and how—group activity (JLR)

Fermi problems (SV)

HW #10—“Scientific Poster”—DRAFT

Week 13 April 17

Class activity: Eliminating fluff in scientific writing

WW #8: “Parallel Construction” (JLR)

Poster Workshop

HW #11—Making Figures and captions

Colloquium Report #2 Due

Week 14 April 24

WW #9: “Shooting for ‘Shorth’” (JLR)

Guest Speaker—Professor Taylor Hughes, “How to Survive Graduate School”

TENTATIVE

HW #12 “Scientific Poster”—FINAL (send to printer)

Last Day to Submit Re-writes for Colloquium Report #1

Week 15 May 1—last day of class

WW Bonus (optional—complete on your own)—“Editing Practice”—submit by Dec 10 for extra credit

HW #13 “Live Poster Presentation” (presented in class)