

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" (JLR)  
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)**