

PHYS496, General Course Information, Spring 2013

Classes

The class will meet on Fridays, 2:00–4:50 PM.

On most class days, we will meet at 2:00 PM in Room 257 Loomis (student computer classroom) for “Writing Workshop” (WW), a series of online activities designed to improve your writing skills. Around 2:50 PM, the class will move to Room 322 Loomis for lectures and other in-class activities.

Course Website

The course syllabus, grading rubric, written instructions for assignments, announcements, lecture notes, and links to useful external resources are posted on the [course website](#). Check it frequently.

Instructors

	Office Hours	Where	Email
Tony M. Liss	by appointment	415 Loomis	tml@illinois.edu
Celia M. Elliott	by appointment	215 Loomis	cmelliot@illinois.edu

Course Rationale

The purpose of this course is to teach you valuable writing, presentation, teamwork, leadership, and organizational skills that will better prepare you for a successful career in science or technology. You will learn good communications practices and standard conventions for physics talks, abstracts, proposals, and papers, and you will be exposed to forefront physics research.

Course Components

The course will consist of in-class writing practice, lectures, student presentations and group exercises, and written homework assignments. No formal exams will be given.

For the in-class writing practice ([WW](#)), you will gain experience in reading and revising technical material electronically and in correcting common rhetorical errors. You will also have an opportunity to ask questions and get detailed feedback from the instructors during WW on your other class assignments.

The written [homework assignments](#) will consist of specific writing tasks, including written evaluations of presentations and papers, abstracts, analogies, outlines, figure captions, web stories for a general audience, and research proposals and reviews. You will also learn how to create effective figures to illustrate your written work.

Formal presentations will include a team journal-club presentation and an informal proposal-review presentation.

Refer to the [class syllabus](#) and written [assignments](#) for additional details and deadlines.

Textbook

No textbook is required for this course. Lecture notes are posted on the course website. Some scientific papers published in the peer-reviewed literature will be assigned; all are available free of charge online through the University's library subscription.

Recommended Reading

The following books are well worth adding to your personal library.

William Cleveland, *Visualizing Data* (Hobart Press, 1993).

Robert A. Day and Barbara Gastel, *How to Write & Publish a Scientific Paper*, 7th ed. (Greenwood, 2011).

Julie Steele and Noah Iliinsky, *Beautiful Visualization: Looking at Data through the Eyes of Experts* (O'Reilly Media, 2010).

Grading

Timely submission of written assignments is required. You will be given feedback on the "communications" aspects of your assignments, and each will contribute to your final grade. A [grading rubric](#) is posted on the course website.

Each WW exercise will be reviewed and points awarded for completing it. Solutions to the WW exercises will be posted on the course website, and individual feedback will be given.

Each homework assignment will be scored and points granted. The total points for each assignment are provided in the written instructions for that assignment and on the grading rubric.

To encourage you to complete your assignments on time and to revise your work, you will be able to earn additional points for rewrites, *provided the initial draft is submitted by the posted due date and time*. Late submissions will be ineligible for "rewrite" points. You will be able to earn additional points for each eligible revision, up to 100 percent of the original points assigned to that exercise.

You may use the student gradebook for PHYS 496 available at my.physics.illinois.edu to check on your grades at any time and to confirm that all your submitted assignments have been graded. Incremental rewrite points will be added to the total points awarded to each assignment in the gradebook.

Assignments

Assignments include both written work and oral presentations. Detailed instructions for each assignment, along with its due date, are [posted on the website](#). Most assignments are due by 6:30 PM on the designated due date, but check the written homework instructions for due dates and times. **Assignments turned in after the deadline date will be downgraded proportionately, depending on lateness, and will not be eligible for rewrite points.**

Deadline extensions will not be granted except for extraordinary circumstances (kidnapping; severe, sustained chest pains; uncontrolled bleeding from a major artery...). Get *something* on paper and get it turned in by the deadline; you will be able to revise and recover the points.

All assignments are to be deposited in the yellow PHYS 496 homework box in the north corridor of the second floor of Loomis Laboratory by the deadline noted on the assignment page.

A [summary](#) of the homework assignments, including points assigned, is posted on the course website.

Don't forget to put your name at the top of the page for homework and WW assignments.

Revisions of Previously Submitted Assignments: If you are submitting a revised assignment for regrading, please note that it is a revision on the top of the page, e.g., "Homework #6_Rev. 1". Subsequent revisions should be labeled in ascending numerical order. Keep *all* files (originals and revisions) for your records.

Writing Workshop

A variety of [exercises](#) have been devised to help you identify writing flaws and practice correcting them. These exercises will be completed in realtime during WW and [emailed to Celia](#) at the end of the workshop. Each submitted WW exercise will contribute to your final grade. Missed exercises may not be made up.

Physics Colloquium

PHYS496 students are required to *attend at least four departmental colloquia* during the semester and *prepare a short written analysis* of each colloquium attended, using the "[Colloquium Report Form](#)." Colloquium is held at 4:00 pm on Wednesdays in Room 141 Loomis. If you have a class conflict and cannot attend Colloquium, email Professor Liss to make alternative arrangements.

As you listen to the colloquium speaker, think critically and analytically not only about the physics, but also about his or her strengths and weaknesses as a speaker and communicator. Did the slides enhance the talk or detract from it? What parts were unclear? How did the speaker handle questions? Did the speaker have any annoying mannerisms?

Completed colloquium reports should be placed in the PHYS 496 homework box.

We will spend about the first 5 minutes of each class discussing that week's colloquium, so be prepared to contribute to the discussion.

Class Administration

Any concerns, questions, or comments about the administration of the course should be directed to Professor Liss.

Email

The instructors will communicate with you about the course via email to your *University of Illinois* email account; check it regularly! If you send email to the instructors, please put PHYS496 in the subject line of each message. We do not use the "threading" feature of some email programs, so don't omit the subject line, and be sure to include your full name in your message.