Paper Assignments and Peerceptiv in ASTR/PHYS 109
Writing your papers, submitting them, and doing the rest of the stages in Peerceptiv

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1. Introduction

One of the primary goals of this course is to be able to effectively communicate the answers to important scientific questions to a lay audience. A secondary skill we want to teach in this course is how to get good at writing documents the way scientists do in the real world, in particular writing drafts of your paper, giving feedback to others on their writing, incorporating feedback into your own writing and iterating the text until it is excellent. The Paper Assignments and the computer assignment procedures we will use are designed to achieve both goals, and we want to be helpful along the way. Since the particular type of writing in this class may be new to you, Section 5.1 in this document contains an example paper outline for your use.

We have chosen these goals for a number of reasons, including that employers often identify communication skills as the most important characteristics of a prospective employee immediately following graduation from college. Learning to write well requires regular practice and feedback. Weekly writing assignments are rare because grading large numbers of essays is very time consuming. Also, most writing classes don't give you enough practice in critiquing your own work and that of others.

In this class, we will be using a web-based program, called **Peerceptiv**, to help achieve these goals. You'll get regular practice and feedback, even in our large class; at the same time you will gain the critical evaluation skills that employers want. A quick link on how to navigate within eCampus to do Peerceptiv stuff can be found at
http://people.physics.tamu.edu/toback/109/WritingAssignments/Peerceptiv_HowTo.mov
There are three stages to each assignment: 1) **Writing Stage**, 2) **Review Stage** and 3) **Back-evaluation Stage**. Each are described in the next section. Each are counted as part of your grade. Most of the bad grades for these assignments come from forgetting to do the Reviewer or Back-evaluation stages. We will allow revisions of the text portion to help you improve your grades.

1.1 Additional Notes
- There is a lot of help for paper writing in this class, both from TA's as well as the Writing Center
  - Since we believe in getting feedback and iteratively improving your draft, we have set things up so that you can get feedback from the TA's about your paper before officially submitting it. Typically, papers will be due on a Wednesday. If you submit a draft to the "Rough Drafts (Optional)" folder in TurnItIn (on eCampus) by Friday night at 11:55PM we will get you feedback in time to improve your paper. Your feedback will appear in the same Folder. We

will do our best to provide help for late submissions, but cannot promise timely feedback. Email 109help@physics.tamu.edu if you need help.
- More information about the A&M Writing Center is at http://writingcenter.tamu.edu with more information
http://people.physics.tamu.edu/toback/109/WritingAssignments/WritingTips.pdf
- Plagiarism is taken VERY seriously in this class. We do not want to expel people from A&M but have in the past. We hope not to do it again. Our rules can be found at http://faculty.physics.tamu.edu/toback/109/WritingAssignments/plagiarism.shtml
- While every paper needs to be completed in Peerceptiv, every paper ALSO needs to be turned in to TurnItIn for the class. Both systems can be found in eCampus. For more information go to http://faculty.physics.tamu.edu/toback/109/WritingAssignments/InstructionsforTurnitin.shtml. There are points penalties for not doing this part of the assignment.

2 Assignment Workflow

There are a total of four papers and one training assignment that will be due throughout the semester. The Reviewer Training assignment (Paper 0) will be done before we do the real papers, and will only include the Review and Back-evaluation stages. For each regular paper you will have to submit to TurnItIn, and do all parts of the Peerceptiv assignment. Both can be found on eCampus. The Peerceptiv portion can be found in the folder labeled "Peerceptiv" within the e-campus homepage.

Each assignment will have three stages, all in Peerceptiv:

1. **Writing Stage:** Within Peerceptiv you will find a description of the topic, along with important guideline information as well as helpful tips. Be sure to read this information for specifics before beginning your paper, for example click on the **_Rubric_** link to make sure you understand what we are looking for. You will typically have a week to write your text. Some notes:
    a. **You will need to submit your final draft to both Peerceptiv and TurnItIn.**
    b. Do **NOT** put your name on your paper.
    c. After you have submitted your document, you will not be able to begin your reviews until the final time on the due date of the Writing Stage. You must wait for the Review stage to begin.
    d. You will be graded on the quality of your submission.
    e. A good example outline is given in Section 5.1 of this document.
    f. If you want feedback on your paper you must do so early by following the instructions in Section 1.2.
2. **Review Stage:** This stage starts only after the Writing Stage for the entire class is over. In it you will be given the text of some of your peers and asked to evaluate the quality of the text. In some ways this is difficult, and in some ways it is much easier than it sounds. We have worked hard to simplify the process. Specifically, when you enter Peerceptiv you will be given a set of questions (called dimensions) and asked to rate the text on a scale from 1-7 for each question (using a drop-down box), and write some text about why you picked that score. You will need to complete a minimum of **_three reviews_**. You will typically have two days to do this portion of the assignment. Some notes:

a. Take your time - your grade here will depend on how accurate your review is.
   b. All reviews are done anonymously, so be sure to leave honest feedback that is helpful to the writer
   c. Extra credit is given for additional reviews! (Note: This is only for the regular assignments, not the practice assignment)
   d. The comments you leave are designed to be helpful to the author you are reviewing. You want to both explain why you picked your scores, as well as give helpful thoughts. Some good and bad examples are given in Section 5.2 of this document.
3. **Back-Evaluation Stage:** This stage starts only after the Review Stage for the entire class is over. In it you will give feedback to your reviewers. Specifically, when you go into Peerceptiv, you will be asked some specific questions and asked to describe what you thought of the feedback/reviews you were given on your paper. This is designed so that the Reviewer (you in the previous section) can see how helpful their reviews were. This will help them give better feedback next time. You typically will have two days to do this portion of the assignment. Some notes:
   a. Remember, even though you may not necessarily *agree* with a review, this is your time to provide feedback on how *constructive/helpful* it is.
   b. Some good and examples are given in Section 5.3 of this document.

You are encouraged to work on each stages of the assignment well before the due date. We have had many students have technical difficulties with their browser or their internet connection. If you start early, you still have time to finish the assignment. If you wait until the last minutes and there are problems, you will miss the due date and suffer the late penalties. In some cases we will not be able to let you even do portions of the assignment late. There are very few cases where we can work with you for portions of the paper that have not been completed. If you need help, send mail to 109help@physics.tamu.edu. Ideally, ahead of time.

3. Grading

Since we are doing more than just writing papers, the grade is based on more than just the text of the paper itself. Since it's a little complicated, it is worth describing it, and then giving some information about what to do if you think you were misgraded and/or want a re-grade.

Peerceptiv gives grades based on the peer ranking of your paper, as well as the quality of your reviews. Throughout the assignment, you will receive a raw score based on the quality of your paper (50%), the quality of your reviews (40%), and the quality of your back-evaluations (10%). After this bonuses and late penalties are applied.

It is important to note that the curve for the papers can change over time so your score might change a little over the course of the semester. The grades can also change as we fix papers that were incorrectly reviewed. In general the curve for the text portion is simply the fraction of the 20 or Rubric questions turned into a fraction. So, if there are 20 question, each with a score between 1-7, and you average a score of 5.3/7 you would get a score of 75.7%. For Reviewer scores, if you are an average reviewer, you should get around an 85%. If you do all the parts of assignments, you will get 100% of the task grade.

If you are unhappy with your grade, there are two things to know. The first is that if you feel you were graded unfairly on any part, you are encouraged to send us an email explaining your case. More on how to submit a request for regrades can be found in Section 4 of this document. The second is that if you just didn't do well on the paper, and want to do better, you are encouraged to submit a revision of your paper (incorporating the feedback you got on the original). The text will be submitted to TurnItIn and graded by the TA. More on this in Section 3.2

3.1 Late Assignments:

It is sometimes possible to do various stages of the assignment late, however you will receive a late penalty for each day the assignment is overdue without an excuse. Once the back-evaluation stage has begun however, it very difficult to submit late documents or reviews technically. If you have special circumstances please send an email to 109help.physics.tamu.edu as far in advance as possible.

3.2 Revisions:

We accept and encourage timely revisions of the text. If you do a revision, submit it to TurnItIn in eCampus. Note that this can only help the text submission portion of your paper grade, and in general, we will take the average of the two text scores as long as the first draft shows a "good-faith" effort". The revised score will be noted in TurnItIn with feedback, and the extra points will be added to your Peerceptiv score.

4. Mis-grades, Regrades and Revisions

It is very important to us that everyone gets the grade they deserve. If you believe you were misgraded, please help us help you. To do this send an email to 109help@physics.tamu.edu with the following information using the example format:

1. Basic information:
   - Which Paper number?
   - Give us the scores the reviewers gave and the feedback they provided
2. Your concern:
   - What was the problem? Examples include: specific question numbers and review scores that you disagree with. Papers you got a low review grade on and don't understand why. Overall scores or individual scores on documents, reviews, or back-evaluations that you disagree with.
   - For each rubric question you disagree with, tell us WHY you disagree, and point to specific examples and quotes from your paper as evidence to support your claim.

Here is a draft of an excellent email to send for a Paper Regrade Request:

I am requesting a regrade for Paper 1 on the Evidence for Dark Matter

Document Raw Score: *35*/50
Review Raw Score: *30*/40
Back-Evaluation Raw Score: *10*/10

I received a document score of *35*/50 and I think I was misgraded in a couple of questions

#10: Graders 2 and 3 both said I never explained what dark matter is and both gave a score of *1*/7. While I agree it is not as clear as it could have been, it is definitely defined and I believe the grading to be too harsh. Here's what I wrote in paragraph 3. [*Quote*]

#13: I believe grader 2 made a mistake here. They said I didn't mention how the planets orbit the Sun but I did mention that they orbit. Here's what I wrote in paragraph 2. [*Quote*]

Ultimately, if you unhappy with your grade, you are encouraged to submit a revision of your paper (incorporating the feedback you got on the original). That can be done in TurnItIn.

5. Examples

Here we provide an example outline for papers (Section 5.1), good and bad examples of feedback to leave during the Review Stage (Section 5.2) and good and bad examples of back-evaluation feedback to leave during the Back-evaluation Stage (Section 5.3)

5.1 Example Document Outline:

Each paper should be about 2 pages long, double spaced. This is about ~600 words (anywhere between 450 and 900 is fine). You should be answering the paper topic question to someone who isn't taking the class (no jargon). No citations! Use your own words and be careful not to use phrases from the book (TurnItIn will notice those). Only use information from the book; nothing from the web should be added. The text should be professional. You are a "trusted guide," not a "buddy" or "comedian." We don't need history, or want history. Just the evidence. Make sure you don't have your name on your paper.

There are many ways to write a good paper for this class. Unfortunately, there are even more ways to write a bad one so we are requiring you to use a specific format that we know works. You will be graded on your ability to follow the required structure for the papers. Let's say the topic is "What is the evidence for the Big Bang?" A typical 2 page paper would have 5 or 6 paragraphs. Let's do an example with 5.

- Paragraph 1: Introduction
  - This is like the opening statements from a lawyer in a trial court case.
  - Include a topic sentence making it clear what question you are answering. For example, be explicit that that you are providing evidence that the universe started with a Big Bang.
  - Make sure you outline the pieces of evidence and other talking points mentioned in the Peerceptiv prompt, and give a sense of how these pieces of evidence will tie together. For example, "There are three primary pieces of evidence for the big bang theory. They are Reason 1, Reason 2 and Reason 3."
- Paragraph 2: Reason/Talking Point 1
  - The evidence paragraphs are like the main part of the trial where you show data, interview witnesses or experts.
  - The topic sentence should say what reason 1 is, and the rest of the paragraph should explain more about Reason 1 and why it is important. Said differently, the paragraph should explain HOW it provides evidence.
- Paragraph 3: Reason/Talking Point 2
  - The topic sentence should say what Reason 2 is, and the rest of the paragraph should explain more about Reason 2, how it provides evidence and why it is important.
- Paragraph 4: Reason/Talking Point 3
  - The topic sentence should say what Reason 3 is, and the rest of the paragraph should explain more about Reason 3, how it provides evidence and why it is important.
- Paragraph 5: Conclusion
  - This paragraph is like the concluding arguments a lawyer might make in trial court case. This paragraph should summarize the pieces of evidence and the argument, and how they

<u>tie together</u> to make a compelling argument and answer the question. Simply restating the evidence is almost never enough to be helpful.

We should should be explicit: ***Not each paper has three pieces of evidence/talking points or should have three middle paragraphs.*** You don't need to put 1 piece of evidence/talking point into each paragraph. However, the middle paragraphs need to be evidence/talking point paragraphs. The introduction will list the evidence/talking points to be discussed, and the conclusion will tie together the pieces of evidence/talking points.

5.2 Example Review Comments:

Reviews help highlight excellent parts of the paper and provide an outlet for constructive feedback for improvements. We next give some examples:

Good/Helpful Review: *"This paper was well outlined, and written in the correct formal style with no obvious grammatical errors. The only confusing part was that on gravitational lensing, and why gravity bends the light, and that is why we can see it. Dark matter doesn't really block out light, but rather the gravitational strength of dark matter bends space-time and the light travels around the galaxy along that curved path. The explanation of the orbital velocities of stars in the galaxy was very clear and showed a great understanding of general relativity."*

Good/Helpful Review: *"The paper was very good. The introduction was very strong, it set up the paper perfectly by introducing us to information that we need to know at the start and it lets us know what the paper is going to be about. Paragraph 1 is good, it reinforces our understanding of gravity and explains why planets farther away rotate slower around the sun, while those closer rotate faster, it also introduces us to the first reason why we believe dark matter exists. Paragraph two was good but it could have been made stronger by including that there are ways scientists are able to calculate just how much force is needed to make the stars on the outside rotate as fast as those closer, giving more reason to believe dark matter exists. Paragraph three is very strong, the example you used was very easy to picture in my head and it was very well explained. The conclusion is good, it reviews all the topics discussed in the paper and wraps them up all together to explain why we believe dark matter exists. Overall this was a very good paper."*

Bad/Unhelpful Review: *"Overall I thought it was okay but it could have been clearer in some parts."*

Bad/Unhelpful Review: *"I thought your paper was excellent."*

5.3 Example Back-Evaluation Comments:

Back evaluations are a way to provide feedback to Reviewers. This will help them become better Reviewers in the future. If you thought a review really helped you understand how you could improve in the future, tell them! Of course good and bad back-evaluation is subjective, especially because they depend on the reviews received from their papers. If you thought a review was super helpful, there's nothing wrong with just stating that. On the other hand, if you don't understand some criticism, let them know how they could improve feedback in the future.

Good/Helpful Back-Evaluation: *"I saw that I did use words that a lay-down person wouldn't understand or comprehend. This was useful because it helps me understand what words to take out and shows me what phrases I used that was difficult to understand. I'll make sure to add more detail towards the gravity portion of evidence. Thank you!"*

Good/Helpful Back-Evaluation: *"Extremely helpful, breaking down each part of my paper and giving feedback for each of those parts is exactly the kind of review I was wanting."*

Bad/Unhelpful Back-Evaluation: *"I didn't understand this review"* Make sure you tell the reviewer how to improve.

Bad/Unhelpful Back-Evaluation: *"thanks"*