

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 learn to effectively write like scientists do in the real world. In particular writing drafts of your paper, giving feedback to others on their writing, and incorporating feedback into your own writing and iterating the text until it is excellent. Since we will be doing a particular type of writing in this class, the last section contains an example outline for your use.

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. There are three stages to each assignment: 1) Submission, 2) Reviews and 3) Back-evaluations. Those are described in the next section. Each are counted as part of your grade.

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 about the paper before you officially submit 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 because of this. We have in the past, but we hope not to do it again. Our rules can be found at <http://faculty.physics.tamu.edu/toback/109/WritingAssignments/plagiarism.shtml>
- Every paper needs to be completed in Peerceptiv, but 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>

2 Assignment Workflow

There are a total of four papers and one training assignment that will be due throughout the semester. For each paper you will have to submit to TurnItIn, and do 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:

1. **Writing Stage:** Each assignment begins with a brief description and outline of the topic, along with helpful tips and guidelines. Be sure to read this information for specifics before beginning your paper. You will typically have a week to do this portion.
 - 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, wait for the Review stage begin.
 - d. You will be graded on the quality of your submission
2. **Review Stage:** Here you will be given the text of some of your peers and asked to evaluate the quality of the text. This is much easier than it sounds. 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.
 - 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!
3. **Back-Evaluation Stage:** This is where you give feedback to your reviewers. Specifically, when you go into Peerceptiv, you will be asked some specific questions and given a location to describe what you thought of the feedback you were given on your paper. This is designed so they can see how helpful their reviews were and help them give better feedback next time. Remember, even though you may not necessarily *agree* with a review, this is your time to provide feedback on how *constructive/helpful* it is. You typically will have two days to do this portion of the assignment.

You are encourage 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 the 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. If you need help, send mail to 109help@physics.tamu.edu

3. Grading

Since we are doing more than just writing papers, the grade is based on more than just 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 has a unique grading system 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 (40%), the quality of your reviews (40%), and the quality of your back-evaluations (20%). After bonuses and late penalties are applied, each paper is assigned a grade based on a fixed curve¹. If you are 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. If you feel you were graded unfairly, you are encouraged to send us an email explaining your case.

It is also 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.

3.1 Late Assignments:

It is possible to do various stages of the assignment late, however you will receive a late penalty for each day the assignment is overdue. Once the back-evaluation stage has begun however, it is no longer possible to submit either late documents or reviews. If you have special circumstances please send an email to 109help.physics.tamu.edu.

3.2: Revisions

We accept and encourage timely revisions. If you do a revision, submit it to TurnItIn in ecampus. We will replace the text portion of your score in the assignment with the new score.

¹ If you are interested, more information can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spearman%27s_rank_correlation_coefficient

4. Mis-grades, Regrades and Revisions

It is very important to us that everyone gets the grade they deserve. To help us help you, send an email to 109help@physics.tamu.edu with the following information:

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 an 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: 25/40

Review Raw Score: 30/40

Back-Evaluation Raw Score: 20/20

I received a document score of 25/40 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. Example Outline

Each paper should be about 2 pages long. 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. Only use information from the book. Text should be professional. You are "trusted guide" not a "buddy" or "comedian"

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 use a specific format 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
 - Include a topic sentence saying that you are answering the question about why scientists have confidence in the Big Bang theory
 - Then outline the reasons you will use as evidence and give a sense of how these pieces of evidence will tie together. For example, "Scientists believe in the theory of the Big Bang for three main reasons. They are Reason 1, Reason 2 and Reason 3."
- Paragraph 2: Reason 1
 - 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. Give some evidence supporting Reason 1.
- Paragraph 3: Reason 2
 - The topic sentence should say what reason 2 is, and the rest of the paragraph should explain more about Reason 2 and why it is important. Give some evidence supporting Reason 2.
- Paragraph 4: Reason 3
 - The topic sentence should say what reason 3 is, and the rest of the paragraph should explain more about Reason 3 and why it is important. Give some evidence supporting Reason 3.
- Paragraph 5: Conclusion
 - This paragraph should summarize the three reasons and how they tie together to make a compelling argument and answer the question. Simply restating the three reasons is not enough.

Again, to be clear: Not each paper has 3 pieces of evidence. You don't need to put 1 piece of evidence into each paragraph. However, the middle paragraphs need to be evidence paragraphs. The introduction will list the evidence to be discussed, and the conclusion will tie together the pieces of evidence.