

## Biochemistry 460, Fall 2019, Syllabus

**Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30-4:50 P.M.**

**Location: 419 RAL** (Biochemistry Seminar Room/ Rose Conference Room)

Why this room? Unlike classrooms, this room has movable tables and chairs that facilitate the small group work you will use to edit and improve your written work.

**TEXTS:** There are no required texts

### **Highly Recommended**

Angelika H. Hofmann. Scientific Writing and Communication: Papers, Proposals and Presentations

Oxford Univ. press (2013 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) ISBN-13: 978-0190278540

Inexpensive.

#### Advantages

Prof Hofmann teaches Yale's scientific writing course, knows the topic

Many examples; shows how to improve poor writing

List of strong and weak ways to make certain kinds of common statements in papers

#### Disadvantages

Dense

Writing is clear, but not especially interesting to read.

Sections on giving presentations and preparing posters are weaker than the sections on writing papers.

#### Recommended

Stephen A. Heard. The Scientists Guide to Writing: How to Write More Easily and Effectively Throughout your Scientific Career.

Princeton University press (2016) ISBN: 978-0-691-17021-3

Inexpensive

#### Advantages

Very strong user reviews on Amazon. 4.9/5 23 5\*, 1 4\*

Easier to read than Hofmann but less comprehensive

Has a fair number of examples

Goes through the entire process from start to reading reviewers comments

#### Disadvantages

Easy chatty style means it sometimes take longer to get to the actual material you need.

Joshua Schimel. Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded.

(ISBN-13: 978-0199760244 ISBN-10: 0199760241)

#### Advantages

Big Picture

Highly readable

High purchaser ratings on Amazon: 4.8/5

#### Disadvantages

May not be specific enough for a beginning student

## More Specialized

Hilars Glasman-Deal. Science Writing for Non-native Speakers of English

ISBN-13: 978-1848163102, ISBN-10: 184816310

Very strong user reviews on Amazon: 4.8/5 22 reviews 86% rated it 5/5, 14% 4/5

PhraseBook for Writing Papers and Research in English

Stephen Howe and Kristina Henriksson

ISBN-13: 978-1492959793, ISBN-10: 1492959790

Solid reviews; There are specific issues that come up in many papers and reader-friendly phrases that address these issues and make papers much easier to follow.

This class does NOT closely mirror the chapter-by-chapter content of these books.

**Instructor:** Professor David Shapiro

Office Hours: Wednesday 3-4, Friday 11-12 and 4-5.

Office: 314D RAL

email: djshapir@illinois.edu

**TA:** Sanatanu Ghosh

Office Hours: 9-10 Mon., Wed., Fri.)

Office: 307 RAL

Email: Santanu2@illinois.edu

**TA:** Lawrence Wang

Office Hours: 2:0-3:30 Tuesday and Thursday

Office: 307 RAL

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Specific meeting times will be scheduled for going over the draft of the journal article.

**Prerequisites:** MCB354, MCB253 or Biochemistry 455 lab and completion of composition 1 requirement

**Course Overview and Objectives:** As research scientists, physicians and health professionals you will need to communicate your ideas, refine your thoughts and be able to discuss them, and constructively criticize and interact with others. As physicians and health professionals, you will need to process information provided by patients and clinical tests, use that information to formulate a diagnosis and treatment plan and communicate clearly and effectively with patients and health care team professionals. This course is designed to give you the opportunities to explore these areas and help you develop and refine your skills. The focus is primarily on scientific writing for scientists and for non-scientists.

The course is structured with a lecture/discussion of a topic in scientific writing. Usually, the students will write material related to that topic and then critique each other's writing in small groups with overall guidance from the instructor.

### **What we will do this semester:**

#### **RESEARCH JOURNAL ARTICLE**

The major writing task is writing a journal article. We provide real current experimental data that the researchers expect to ultimately submit for publication. Lectures provide scientific background and context for the topic and guidance for writing each section of the manuscript. You will use this information to produce figures and write a scientific paper. As you write each section of the manuscript it will be refined in small group discussions. Based on student input we require that students also submit the sections of the manuscript that are being critiqued. If the student has made a sincere effort to write the section due for small group discussion that week, it will be deemed satisfactory. The initial draft is handed in and reviewed by the teaching assistants who will then meet with you each of you and provide one-on-one guidance and suggestions for ways to improve the final draft of the manuscript.

In chronologic order

#### **PERSONAL LETTER**

A description of your background and what you hope to gain from the class. Because this contains personal information, it will be graded by the instructors and will NOT be reviewed in the small groups.

#### **WATSON-CRICK ABSTRACT**

The classic Nature papers describing the structure of DNA do not contain an abstract. We will discuss how to write compelling, attention-getting abstracts and you will write a single Abstract covering both of these papers. Your abstract will be refined in small group discussions and you will also read and critique the Abstracts of others.

#### **GRANT PROPOSAL ABSTRACTS**

We will provide a grant proposal without the Abstracts. You will use that proposal to prepare a Technical Abstract for research scientists and a Public or Lay Abstract for non-specialists.

#### **RESEARCH JOURNAL ARTICLE**

Sections

Draft

Final Manuscript with Press Release for your Journal Article

## GRADING

1. Personal Letter	2
2. Watson-Crick Paper Abstract	6
3A. Grant: Technical Abstract	6
3B Grant: Public Abstract	6
4A. Journal Article, Assignments S/U	- (If U, lower grade for participation)
4B Journal Article, Draft	11
4C Journal Article, Final	52
4D Press Release for Journal Article	8
5. Class Participation	9

Ungraded: Reviewing Hall Posters

**It's a lot for all of us to deal with, but there are no written exams.**

## GRADING WRITING

The answer to a True-False or multiple choice question is normally either correct or incorrect. Grading writing is more nuanced and, in part, comes from how the various elements of a document come together. It is therefore nearly impossible to provide a detailed explanation for why something is graded as 8, rather than 8.5. We recognize that you are not experienced writers and will grade accordingly.

We will provide more details on how your writing is graded later this semester.

## SUBMITTING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

### PRELIMINARY CLASS SCHEDULE

There will probably be two guest lectures. Dates TBD

**Diana Yates**, UIUC New Bureau, Editor and chief writer for Biological Sciences, Applied Health Sciences and Agriculture.

**Prof. Robert Switzer**. Our most accomplished author: Technical: Published a highly successful biochemistry laboratory manual "Experimental Biochemistry": Non-fiction: An autobiographical work about his early "Life on a Farm": Fiction: "The Lady Professor" a historical novel about an early woman scientist.

### Week 1. Aug. 27 and 29

Jeff Goldberg

Schedule and Course Overview

Types of scientific communication

"The Science of Scientific Writing" Gopen and Swan, American Scientist, 1990

**ASSIGNMENT 1: PERSONAL LETTER DUE BY 5 P.M., Tuesday Sep. 3**

## **Week 2. Sep. 3 and 5**

Class Discussion of Gopen and Swan  
Common errors and problems in scientific writing  
Writing Abstract's for manuscripts  
Nature's overview of how to create a compelling short abstract  
Short descriptive abstracts in high profile papers

**ASSIGNMENT 2: DRAFT OF WATSON-CRICK ABSTRACT (<100 WORDS),  
ABSTRACT DUE FOR YOUR PANEL BY 5 P.M. WED SEP. 4**

**Discussion of your Abstracts in small group panels in class on THURSDAY SEP.  
5.**

## **Week 3. Sep. 10 and 12**

**ASSIGNMENT 2: WATSON-CRICK ABSTRACTS (maximum of 100  
words) DUE BY 11:59 P.M. Sat, Sep. 6.**

Overview of grant proposal contents

### **Technical Abstracts:**

A mini-grant in one page.

Balancing details about goals with the big picture of why the reader should care

### **Public Abstracts:**

Writing for the informed public and non-specialist

Researchers. Keeping specialist readers, patients, and non-specialists engaged.

Replacing jargon in the abstract.

## **Week 4. Sep. 17 and 19**

How to engender reader enthusiasm for grant abstracts

Grant review process

Guest lecture

**ASSIGNMENT 3A: Draft of Technical Abstract due for small group by  
5 P.M., Wednesday, Sep. 18**

**ASSIGNMENT 3B: Draft of Public Abstract due for small group by 5  
P.M., Monday Sep. 23.**

## **Week 5. Sep. 24 and 26**

## **ASSIGNMENT 3A AND 3B TECHNICAL AND PUBLIC ABSTRACTS DUE BY 11:59 P.M. SATURDAY, SEP. 28**

Longer JBC/Biochemistry-style abstracts that contain more experimental results; usually 150-250 words.

Evolution of an actual Abstract through several drafts

In small panels and in full class

Overview of research article expectations

Organizing information for a research article

Background and information for the research article

Data for the research article

### **Week 6. Oct. 1 and 3**

Organizing data in figures

Outlining the main themes of the paper

Format and section content, Titles

Highlights and One-line descriptors

Common problems in scientific writing

Strategies for a strong Introduction

### **ASSIGNMENT 4A RESEARCH ARTICLE: Drafts of Figures to your small panels Wednesday, Oct. 2, 5 P.M., for review ON Thursday Oct. 3**

### **Week 7. Oct. 8 and 10**

#### **ASSIGNMENT 4A RESEARCH ARTICLE: BY 11:59 P.M., Monday Oct. 7 Draft of Title, brief one line descriptors and Introduction to small panel for review.**

Preparing figures, doing calculations, presenting data, Tables graphs etc.

Writing the Results, Organizing the results so they experiments flow logically and you say what you intended to say.

Discussion. Don't just repeat the results

Identifying how the findings fit into the larger scheme.

How do these data relate to prior knowledge?

### **Week 8. Oct. 15 and 17**

#### **ASSIGNMENT 4A RESEARCH ARTICLE: Sunday, Oct. 13, 11:59 P.M. Draft of Experimental Procedures (Materials and Methods) and Results with Figures to small panel for review.**

Finding things to discuss when you are not an expert in the field

A Discussion that does more than go over the data

References and literature searches

## **Week 9. Oct. 22 and 24**

**ASSIGNMENT 4A RESEARCH ARTICLE: Sunday Oct. 20 11:59 P.M. Draft of Discussion to small panel**

Guest lecture  
Assembling a finished manuscript  
Writing for the informed general public

## **Week 10. Oct. 29 and 31**

**ASSIGNMENT 4A RESEARCH ARTICLE: Sunday Oct. 27 11:59 P.M. Draft of complete manuscript including Title, Descriptors, Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Figures and Figure legends, Results, Discussion to small panel**

## **Week 11. Nov. 5 and 7**

Going from your research paper to a press release  
Evolution of two press releases  
Writing compelling abstracts for meetings  
Keys to effective presentations

**ASSIGNMENT 4B RESEARCH ARTICLE: DRAFT DUE: Draft submitted for our grading and comments by 11:59 P.M, Monday, Nov. 4**

## **Week 12. Nov. 12 and 14**

**NO CLASS, INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH TAs TO GO OVER YOUR DRAFTS (Be sure to sign up for an appointment)**

## **Week 13 Nov. 19 and 21.**

How to organize a poster  
Turning your research paper into a poster  
Rating the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floor posters

## **Week Nov. 26 and 28**

**Fall Thanksgiving break, no classes**

## **Week 14. Dec. 3 and 5**

Common writing problems that emerged, your suggestions for improvement

**ASSIGNMENT 4A RESEARCH ARTICLE: Press release to small panel for review by 11:59 P.M. Wed. Dec. 4.**

## **Week 15. Dec. 10**

Having trouble with your Discussion, some possible topics  
Course overview, your suggestions for improvement

**ASSIGNMENTS 4C and 4D RESEARCH ARTICLE: FINAL  
MANUSCRIPT AND PRESS RELEASE DUE BY 11:59 P.M. Tuesday,  
DEC. 17.**