"Scientific Writing – How to be a Productive and Effective Writer"

Fall Semester 2017, three credit hours, Graduate Level

Meeting time and place: Wednesday 1330-1630 hrs Skeen Hall room N200

Required texts:


How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing (Paperback) 


SYLLABUS AND COURSE SCHEDULE

Co-Instructors: Dr. Rich Pratt and Dr. Brian Schutte

Contact Info: Rich Pratt ricpratt@nmsu.edu

Contact Info: Dr. Brian Shutte

Students will improve their writing skills and gain an understanding of how to navigate the scientific publishing process from start to finish. Students in the 625 cross-listing will be required to perform additional research related writing activities above those required for 525.

ENROLLMENT: Course nos. (AGRO CRN 53208), (HORT CRN 53209), (SOIL CRN 53210) and (EPWS CRN: 55760)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn how to better organize the results of their experiments and communicate them to the scientific community through publication in peer-reviewed journals.
Students will improve their writing skills so that manuscript preparation becomes more efficient and productive.

Students will learn how to successfully navigate a manuscript through the submission, peer-review, and publication process.

Students will learn to become effective reviewers.

**SYLLABUS and SCHEDULE:**

**Weeks 1 and 2**
Introduction

- What is scientific writing, why should I care, and how does it differ from other types of writing?
- The importance of becoming an effective writer and publishing in scientific journals
- Is writing really that hard? Getting writing done, overcoming barriers to writing (*starting a writing schedule is paramount*)
- Overview of steps in the publication process

Reading assignments: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Silvia “How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing,” Gladon et al “Getting Published in the Life Sciences” Chapters 1 (The Importance of and Need for Publishing), 2 (Steps in Manuscript Preparation and Getting Started) and 6 (Principles and Characteristics of Good Scientific Writing)

Assignment: Identify examples of good writing and poor writing (one paragraph unit of each). Write a one page educational biosketch (double spaced; due Aug. 23). Develop a writing schedule spreadsheet and keep a writing diary (draft due Aug. 30).

**Weeks 3 and 4.**

What is good writing?
- An approach to good writing style
- Unnecessary words and (unnecessary) phrases
- The top ten grammatical mistakes, and how to avoid them
- Tricks of the trade can make you a pro
- Writing for your audience

Exercise: *Analysis of samples*

Assignment: Select one or more papers in your field that you think are excellent papers. *Due Sept. 6.*
The instructors will also choose a model paper of general interest to use as an example throughout the course.

Reading assignments: Silvia chapter 6 (Writing Journal Articles) and chapters 7 (Developing the Take-Home messages and the Provisional Title), and 8 (Organizing and Outlining Your Manuscript) followed by chapters 9, 10 (Results I and II) in Gladon et al.

Read Gopen & Swan article (on canvas)

Exercises 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 "Getting Started Exercise", pp 20-22 in Gladon et al. Getting Started, Developing Take Home Messages, Provisional Titles

**Weeks 5 and 6**

Now that I have data, how do I start organizing it for publication?

- Developing the take-home message
- Provisional Title

Exercise: Report to the class what the strengths of the paper(s) are; how will you use these papers as models for your own manuscript?

- Complete the "Developing Take-Home Messages Exercise" - Gladon et al., pp 80-83 (Ex. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3)
- Complete the “Organizing Take-Home Messages into an Outline” Exercises - Gladon et al., pp 100-111 (Ex. 8.1 and 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 as appropriate; 8.5+ as appropriate)
- Write an outline of your manuscript:
- Reading assignments: Complete chapters 11, 12 and start reading chapters 14, 15, 16 in Gladon et al.

**Week 7 and 8**

Results Section

Reading assignments: Chapters 17 and 21 in Gladon et al.

Exercises: Students will start preparing a short manuscript as the major class assignment, based on their own data (or that of others if they are not yet at that stage in their research – data will be provided).

**Weeks 9 and 10**

- References
- Materials and Methods
- Introduction
- Discussion
- Abstract
- Final Title
Reading assignments: Chapter 13, 18, 19, 20, and 21 in Gladon et al.

**Weeks 11 and 12**

**Editing**

The final draft- it is not just about writing. It is about rewriting and rewriting…..

Luellen: “Be your own worst critic and improve your writing,”

“Writing, the fine art of throwing your words away”

“Sequence of words affects their clarity”

Exercise: *Ongoing assistance with manuscript preparation. Students will be trained in the use of editing features in word processing to prepare their reviews.*

Reading assignments: Chapters 3, 4, 5, 22, 23, 24, 24, 25, and 26 in Gladon et al.

- Submitting the manuscript
- Cover letters
- The review process

Exercise: *Students will be assigned to review each other’s writing exercises to help develop their skills in peer review.*

**Week 13**

Looking at a manuscript from both sides: Learning to become an effective reviewer will also help you become a better writer.

Share reviews of manuscripts

- How to respond constructively to a review (without alienating the editor)
- How to proof-read your galley proofs

Reading Assignment: Chapter 8 in Silvia (The Good Things Still to Be Written)

**Week 14**

Other types of writing (time permitting; for the public, for legislators, etc.)

**Week 15**

Final Exam
Writing Resources:
Editor’s Handbook. 1999. Published by ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, Madison, WI.
Matthews, J.R., J.M. Bowen, and R.W. Matthews. 1983. Effective Science Communication: A Workbook for Biological, Medical, and Technical Writers. Published by the University of Georgia, Athens, GA.
Publications Handbook and Style Manual. 1998. Published by ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, Madison, WI.
Weisman, H.M., Basic Technical Writing, 4th Edition. Published by Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, OH.

Reviewing:
**Writer’s Guides and Style manuals:**


**Publishing**

**Miscellaneous Documents:**
Crop Science Editorial Board Meeting 2001, documents.

**POLICIES**

**Grading:**

The final grade in the course will be based on the total points earned during the course. No extra credit projects will be offered. The total points awarded will be (500), and are organized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>25 pts.</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of writing, edu. biosketch</td>
<td>25 pts.</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class report on a “model” paper</td>
<td>25 pts.</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing journal and goals</td>
<td>25 pts.</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of manuscript</td>
<td>250 pts.</td>
<td>(50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing manuscripts</td>
<td>50 pts.</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>100 pts.</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**TOTAL** – 500 points

Incomplete grades are given only if the student encounters a documented illness or family emergency. Prior notification (24 hrs.) regarding class absence and documentation of the absence must be received by the instructor within three days of return.

**Late Assignments:** Lose 10% of points each day; not accepted if more than 2 days late.

In future: Students in the 625 course will be required to perform additional research writing activities than those students in the 525 cross-listing.
CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION
Students are expected to attend every class period and to participate in class discussions and exercises. Excused absences for require notification and approval at least 24 hours prior to absence. In the case of medical or family emergencies, notify both instructors as soon as possible.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES
All medical information regarding disabilities will be held in strict confidence by the University. If you have or believe you have a disability that interferes with your academic progress, you may contact Student Accessibility Services at 646-6840 (voice phone) for an appointment (Corbett Center, Room 244). A text telephone number for hearing impaired (TDD/Text) is 646-1918. Please provide documentation about your disability to the SAS office. After you register with SAS (or if you already have registered) and need accommodations, please provide your “accommodations memo” (from the SAS) to Dr. Pratt within 2 weeks of the first class meeting. The memo needs to be addressed to Dr. Pratt. You may then discuss accommodations with me, then I will review and approve the accommodations and return the memo to you to turn in to SAS no later than five (5) days after receiving written approval from me. Appropriate accommodations will then be provided.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
It is the student’s responsibility to advise the instructor of chronic disabilities during the first week of the quarter. The instructor and student will work with the Office of Disability Services to provide appropriate accommodations. No special accommodations will be made for students who do not inform the instructor in a timely fashion, or who do not involve the Office of Disability Services. Temporary disabilities will be accommodated at the instructor’s discretion.

CODE OF CONDUCT:
1) Respect of others (including instructors and guests) is required of everyone in the classroom at all times.
2) Students are expected to adopt the honor system during quizzes and exams. This system requires no cheating during exams and quizzes, and reporting of any observed, suspected violations. Suspected violations will be handled in accordance with university procedures on misbehavior and academic dishonesty as described in the Student Handbook and Faculty Rules.
3) Plagiarism is not allowed. Suspected misconduct will be handled in accordance with established university policy as stated in the Student Handbook and Faculty Rules.

PLAGIARISM
The NMSU Student Handbook states that “Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to ...”

1. Cheating or knowingly assisting another student in committing an act of
cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty;

2. Plagiarism, which includes, but is not necessarily limited to, submitting examinations, themes, reports, drawings, laboratory notes, undocumented quotations, computer processed materials, or other material as one’s own work when such work has been prepared by another person or copied from another person.

3. Unauthorized possession of examinations, reserve library materials, or laboratory materials.

4. Unauthorized changing of grades on an examination, in an instructor’s grade book, or on a grade report; or unauthorized access to academic computer records.

5. Nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other University records in, or for, academic departments or colleges.

The NMSU Student Handbook states the following are possible sanctions that may be imposed on individual students for infraction of regulations.

1. Disciplinary Probation
2. Disciplinary Suspension
3. Dismissal
4. Expulsion

As an alternative, an instructor may deem it appropriate to give a “0” grade for the plagiarized work, or for the entire course.