

Astronomy 278, Winter 2026

Scientific Writing

Class Meeting Time: Wednesday 10:00 am – 11:50 am, 3-735 PAB (3rd Floor Classroom)

Homepage: <http://www.astro.ucla.edu/~aes/AST278>

Bruin Learn Homepage: <https://bruinlearn.ucla.edu/courses/220484>

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Office Hours: By appointment.

1 Overview

Scientific papers are commonly considered the currency of our field. The purpose of this 2-hour-per-week seminar is to learn the principles of scientific writing and critical thinking. These will include the macroscopic methods of writing and reading a scientific paper, as well as the nitty-gritty details of constructing well-written sentences and paragraphs. Every week, each enrolled student will submit a short writing assignment (< 1 page). These writing samples will form part of the basis of an in-class writing workshop.

2 Format

Each class meeting will consist of a lecture presentation by Professor Shapley on the topic of the week. The second part of each meeting will be interactive and include both in-class exercises and workshopping of samples of student writing.

3 Grading

The grading for this course will be based on your weekly writing assignments and participation in class. I expect that everyone will do just fine!

4 Texts

Scientific Writing and Communication (2022), by Angelika Hofmann
The Elements of Style (1999), by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White
(Electronic link: <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>).

Scientific Writing and Communication is integral to the scientific writing component of the course, while the Strunk and White provides useful background on the same subject. Please check the course website for links to additional resources and readings.

5 Schedule of Topics

Lecture	Date	Topic
1	Jan. 7	Course intro and class logistics; The Introduction
2	14	Methods
3	28	Results
4	Feb. 2	Discussion
5	9	Abstract
6	18	Bibliography; Acknowledgements; Referee Reports
7	25	Figures and Tables
8	Mar. 4	Word Choice and Placement
9	11	Sentences: Grammar and Style; Paragraphs
10	16	Editing workshop; Information “Pot-Luck”