LABORATORY WRITING PRACTICUM

(FOR 1830 BIOCHEMISTRY LAB, 1950 MOLECULAR GENETICS LAB)

Meeting Times: During the lab course we’ll communicate and discuss assignments. We may meet as a group for discussions on writing.

Locations: A144 (Office), A146-A148 (Labs) Langley Hall

Instructor: Vern Twombly
A144 Langley Hall
412-624-4453
twombly@pitt.edu Office Hours are available by appointment.

PREREQUISITE

There are no prerequisites, except those for the laboratory class. Nonetheless, this course will require substantial writing skills that you have acquired through your prior courses and experiences.

INTRODUCTION & COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will entail a variety of assignments that are meant to reinforce the notion that clear writing equates with clear and logical thinking with particular emphasis of the specific skills needed to produce a peer reviewed scientific publication. Superb writing is a blend of crystal clear thoughts, exquisite organization, the logical flow of a mathematical proof, and a bit of the flair a lawyer gives a closing argument. Because scientific publications almost always include figure, tables, and/or graphs, you will also be taught how to produce professional figures, which ultimately are the visual conveyance of information (data). Finally, this course will be tailored to the individual students by assigning writing tasks that mesh with their position in their education and their future plans.

The assignments vary from semester to semester. They have included:

- Warm-up Exercise: A letter of recommendation for your lab partner.
- Warm-up Exercise: Statement of purpose for your professional school application.
- Making professional quality labeled figures with titles and legends.
- Writing a results section from a collection of Data Figures.
- Writing a research formatted paper for the semester’s course experiments, including Abstract, Introduction, Figures, Results, and Discussion.
- Writing and crafting a poster for the semester’s course experiments, including Abstract, Introduction, Figures, Results, and Discussion
- Writing related to the research lab that you work in – a peer reviewed paper, summary of your project and experiments.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The early & midterm assignments will be determined by the instructor. There is a great deal of latitude in the choices of for the final assignment. However, the final assignment you choose must culminate in a substantial piece of writing (12-15 pages) that is scientific in content. All writing you craft will undergo one or more rounds of significant editing by me and/or your classmates.

Content Learned:
Reading scientific papers efficiently
Searching PubMed efficiently
Searching PubMed to find relevant and credible research
Crafting professional figures using MS PowerPoint
Citing references correctly
Receiving editing
Editing writing
Writing a research formatted paper

Format and Time Expectations: Assignments will be sent via CourseWeb/email during the semester. Clarifications and questions about assignment, writing, and grading can be accomplished during lab in discussions and by appointment in my office. You can expect to write a minimum of 25 pages of double spaced, 12 point font this semester. In general you can expect to spend roughly 16-25 hours on this course. The writing will be strongly scientific in nature, though we may limber up our writing muscles with other short exercises. All writing will be critiqued and given a chance for revision. IT IS BY REVISION WE LEARN TO WRITE.

Text: There is no textbook for the course. We will draw material for this course from papers, reviews, and texts that will be provided to you. If you seek background information for science writing, I have several text books in my office.

Computers: You will need to use computers to write assignments, research the web for material needed in assignments, to send assignments, and to communicate with me. Hopefully you will learn a few tricks about Word Processing Programs with regard to science writing. In addition I will teach you how to efficiently search PubMed.

Communication & Distribution of Information: Almost all course material will be distributed to you via Course Web. I will only communicate to you through your pitt.edu email account. Documents you send MUST follow the 4 underlined rules below;

1) File Name
   a) You must include your last name followed by the assignment name, abbreviated if necessary.
   b) Never make a file name too long.
   c) Never include unusual, “top row”characters, such as “/", ", !, @, $, %, &, *, (, ), +, ?, <, >, ~”.
   d) You must place your name in the document (not just in the document name).

2) When emailing a document I strongly recommend that you copy yourself when sending a document. This way you can check if it was sent, and whether your document was attached and openable after its electronic journey.
DISABILITIES RESOURCE SERVICES
If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, [412-648-7890/412-383-7355(TTY)] as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY
Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below (**), will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for a quiz, exam, or paper will be imposed.

** The integrity of the academic process requires fair and impartial evaluation on the part of faculty and honest academic conduct on the part of students. To this end, students are expected to conduct themselves at a high level of responsibility in the fulfillment of the course of their study. It is the corresponding responsibility of faculty to make clear to students those standards by which students will be evaluated, and the resources permissible for use by students during the course of their study and evaluation. Students to the data or views offered by faculty perceive as a joint faculty-student enterprise, which will perforce involve professional judgment by faculty and may involve—without penalty—reasoned exception the educational process. Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom, February 1974