Tell me a bit about yourself

1. Career goals
2. Some skills/experience/achievements that you believe are useful steps toward achieving your career goals
3. Your hopes/goals for this course
4. Favorite topics of astronomy/physics

A few comments about my interests…

“At the last dim horizon, we search among ghostly errors of observations for landmarks that are scarcely more substantial.”

— Edwin Hubble

Most of the Universe is utterly mysterious.

However, even the ordinary matter is poorly understood.

Absorption Spectroscopy
**Course motivation and goals.**

*Writing is a crucial skill.*

You should be a competent writer when you graduate.

However, writing styles and techniques depend strongly on discipline and context, and the writing style appropriate for your career possibly (probably) was not in the basic English courses that you have already completed.

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**Course motivation and goals.**

1. **Our primary goal is to practice writing** in a variety of contexts that might be encountered in astronomy/physics careers.

   **Examples:**
   - Formal journal paper, e.g., as would be appropriate for submission to *The Astrophysical Journal*
   - Article for popular consumption, as might appear in *Sky & Telescope* or *The New York Times*
   - Grant proposal
   - Scientific conference paper

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**Course motivation and goals.**

1. **Our primary goal is to practice writing** in a variety of contexts that might be encountered in astronomy/physics careers.

   **Practice**
   **The Faux Research Project**

   - Real data from the *Hubble Space Telescope* archive
   - A few pointers about things to do with these data
   - Off you go. Using the Astronomy Dept. computer lab, you’ll have to do some measurements and analysis, and then…
   - **Write it up in the style of a journal paper.**
   - Grade will be based on quality of the writing, not the quality of the research.

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**Course prerequisites**

* English 112 or 113
* Completion of 200-level or higher astronomy or physics course
* At least two semesters of physics sequence
* Junior or senior

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**Grading.**

* No exams. It’s a writing course.
* Plenty of writing assignments. It’s a writing course.
* Three types of assignments:
  - “low-stakes” essays/papers/blurbs
  - “high-stakes” formal papers
  - peer review work
Grading.

- Assessments will be given in different categories, e.g.,
  - Content, accuracy, quality of research
  - Organization, clarity, persuasiveness
  - Mechanics, grammar, proofreading
  - Overall

“Low-stakes” assignments

- Examples: short essay, critique of professional writing piece (e.g., critique of a real press release or magazine article)
- Simplified grading, e.g.:
  - Two-level: Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
  - Three-level: weak, o.k., strong
- Some assignments will place more emphasis on one aspect or another, e.g., in some cases content and ideas will be more important than organization and mechanics

“High-stakes” assignments

- Examples: Research paper, grant proposal, paper for popular media
- Traditional grading: A - F
- Multiple versions: 1st draft, revised draft, final paper
- A few oral presentations will be required; at least one will be a high-stakes, graded assignment.

Grading.

- No exams. It’s a writing course.
- Tons of writing assignments. It’s a writing course.
- Three types of assignments:
  - “low-stakes” essays/papers/blurbs
  - “high-stakes” formal papers
  - peer review work

Don’t blow off the low-stakes and peer review assignments. These will affect the final grade.

1st assignment: pick topic for review paper

- The first high-stakes paper will be a “review” paper on a topic of astronomy/astrophysics.
- Traditional college research paper, i.e., not required to be in formal journal style and format
- Pick three topics, Write a tentative paper title and (if you like) some brief comments and email them to me, in order of preference.
- I will pick one of the topics for your paper.

Topics must be emailed to me by Jan. 24 tripp@astro.umass.edu

Information sources must be properly cited.

- Be especially careful about fishing stuff off of random web pages.
- Many assignments will require an appropriate number of citations of legitimate information sources.
The best way to learn how to write is to read.

You will be required to read various materials for course assignments, but feel free to read additional astronomy stuff on your own....

2nd assignment: *Elements of Style* (Strunk & White)

- This is not a grammar class, but...
- You will be expected to write with proper grammar and to adhere to the *style* guidelines in Strunk & White
- Assignment: write a critique/essay/book report about *Elements of Style*
- Format: you choose.
- Length: again, you choose, but it should be clear to me that you really read the book.
- **Assignment due: Tues. February 2** (sooner is better)

High-stakes (graded) assignment.

3rd assignment: in-class essay

- Write an essay on one of the following topics:
  1) Why did you choose to major in astronomy/physics?
  2) Why should the federal government fund research in astronomy/physics?
- Make use of the available time; I expect more than a few sentences. Optional: write a brief outline first.