

PHYS 4602 — Spring 2009

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Course Objectives:

This course provides an opportunity for developing good oral communication skills, which are crucially important for advancement in future scientific and/or professional careers. Grades in this course will be based on both oral presentations and class participation. Each student is required to prepare carefully and deliver a 20-minute scientific talk. The schedule and logistics for each student's talk will be discussed in detail during the first class meeting. Additionally, each student is expected to attend all seminars and to provide active feedback to other student speakers.

Grading:

Letter grade assignments in this course will be based on three categories: Participation (60%); Preparation (30%); and Presentation (10%).

The Participation Criterion will be based upon student attendance (see below) and upon the completion of a peer evaluation of each classmate's research talk. (The results of these peer evaluations will not affect grades; they are purely for informational feedback to each student.)

The Preparation Criterion will be based upon each student giving a dry run presentation for the course instructor, some time prior to the official in-class research talk. (Ideally, the dry run should be given several days prior to the actual presentation.) The purpose of this dry-run is to practice the talk and get some constructive feedback regarding content or style, which can be used to fine-tune the presentation. Provided you show a modest improvement between the dry run and the final talk, the Preparation Criterion will be judged as fully satisfied.

If you do not give a dry run, the final presentation will be worth 40% of your grade, and the quality of that talk will end up contributing significantly to your final grade. (You should think of the dry run as being an "insurance policy" against having a bad day when you give your final talk.)

The final Presentation Criterion will be based on your in-class research talk. Note that since this counts only 10% of your grade, you do not need to give an exceptional, genius-level presentation in order to get an A in the course. Provided you have done well in the areas of Participation and Preparation, all that is required is a reasonably competent lecture. Note, though, that a passing grade is contingent upon giving some sort of research presentation; if you do not give a talk, you will fail the course (or, if circumstances warrant, you will receive an Incomplete).

Attendance:

Attendance in the course is mandatory. The final course grade will be reduced by one letter grade for each unexcused absence from a seminar. Excused absences will be allowed only for situations approved by the Dean of Students or for participation in activities approved by the Student Academic and Financial Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate (must be requested in advance). If you anticipate missing a class for some other "justifiable" reason (e.g. job interview), please see me in advance to request a special dispensation.

The final day of class (during Dead Week) is set aside for an exit survey. This survey is an important tool used by the School of Physics for self-assessment purposes. It is our goal to get this survey information from every one of our seniors before they graduate. Attendance will be taken on the last day of class, and missing the exit survey without an approved excuse will count against your Participation score.

Good Advice:

Inexperienced public speakers may wish to obtain copies of the following supplemental handouts, available from the instructor:

- Advice to Beginning Physics Speakers
- Editorial on Faraday's Advice to Lecturers
- How to Present an Oral Paper