

ASSIGNMENT # 2

Astro 597 – Winter 2020 Writing Workshop

As with the last assignment, please do the following exercises using a timer. Try 15 minutes for the first attempt. Then, if needed, take a second 15 minutes.

I want you to do each section on a different day. It is important that you get in the habit of writing regularly, and you practice enough to experience that writing frequently for short periods leaves ample time for other aspects of your research. If you're on a roll, feel free to write additional paragraphs of the same style in a single session (i.e., multiple descriptive paragraphs on Monday), but do the writing of the second style on a different day.

If you need help working efficiently under short time limits, try doing some advance planning about what you will write about. In other words, separate your “deciding what I want to say” step from your “writing down what I want to say” step. If you have a problem with compulsively editing as you go, try <http://blindwrite.herokuapp.com>.

Please turn in both the unedited and edited versions, and include how long you worked on each.

1: WRITE 1 UN-EDITED DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH FOR YOUR PROJECT.

Please write a single paragraph for your project. Pick a paragraph topic that will be a straightforward description of something you did (i.e., one that would go in your data analysis section, like “We selected stars from the 2MASS point source catalog. We selected candidate M giants by restricting the catalog to sources redder than $J-H=1$. This cut still allowed a large number of AGN into our selection, and therefore we added an additional cut that...”). *Do not edit the paragraph, or worry about sticking in references or actual numbers! Just get the ideas down.*

2: WRITE 1 UN-EDITED PARAGRAPH DESCRIBING A FIGURE FOR YOUR PROJECT.

Please write a single paragraph that describes a plot. Introduce the figure and its key elements, but *do not do any interpretation* (i.e., “Figure 1 shows the dust extinction as a function of galaxy color. The extinction and galaxy colors are calculated for a series of bins of stellar mass. The large circles indicate the median of all the galaxies in each bin, and the error bars show the inner quartile range. The points are color-coded according to the median stellar mass in each bin.”); any interpretation of what this plot means would go as either a single closing sentence, or preferably as a full discussion in the following paragraph. When introducing the figure, start with the most general features before pointing out details. As with # 1, *Do not edit the paragraph! Just get the ideas down.*

3: EDIT EACH OF YOUR TWO PARAGRAPHS

Edit the two paragraphs you wrote earlier in the week. Concentrate primarily on fixing the sentence structure at this time. Are the sentences as short and declarative as possible? Are they efficient? Have you separated phrases and clauses with commas? Are the subject, verb, and object as close together as possible? Are the tenses (past versus present) the same throughout? Are you using parallel structure within lists? If you read the sentences outloud, do they sound unobjectionable?

If you feel good about the above, you can take an additional editing pass for content. Is the information “complete” (i.e., have you provided enough detail that the reader could reproduce what you did)? Is the order of the sentences sensible (i.e., would you use the same order if you were explaining your methods/plot in a talk)? Have you inadvertently introduced information that would better go as part of a different paragraph that more fully discusses the issue?

4: READ THE GOPEN & SWAN PAPER (THIS WEEK OR NEXT).

This is the single most influential paper I may have ever read. We will go through much of this in class. If you're swamped this week, you can put off reading it until next week.