

Valdosta State University
Department of Biology
BIOL 6010: Science Writing & Communication
Course Syllabus, Spring 2024

Instructor: Dr. Erin Grabarczyk

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In-person office hours: Tuesday 3:15-4:45PM, Thursday 3:15-4:45PM, or by appointment.

Virtual office hours: Monday 8AM-10AM on TEAMS, or by appointment.

Lecture: TR 5-6:15 PM, BSC 2202

Lab/Recitation: M 5-7:50 PM, BSC 1043

Course overview: A workshop and project-oriented course in scientific writing and communication. The primary focus is on drafting a Master's thesis in the style of a peer-reviewed journal article. Enrolling students must have a research project or proposal advanced enough to be written up as part of the course activity, and must be willing to share drafts with classmates. Class and lab/recitation sessions will consist of a combination of traditional lecture and active learning. In addition to writing their thesis, students will be exposed to other skills necessary for writing success, such as using a citation manager, production of publication-ready figures in R Program Software, self-editing techniques, and addressing revision requests.

Prerequisites for BIOL 6010: Admission to the Biology graduate program.

Class Policies

- **Classroom etiquette:** Please be on time. Please turn off your cell phone. If you are disrupting the class, I will ask you to leave. Be respectful of yourself, your classmates, and your instructor.
- **Constructive criticism:** We are all here to learn how to be better writers and Science communicators. There is no expectation that your work is perfect. Our goal is to collectively improve our skills, which is a process that will continue throughout your entire career! Therefore, peer editing and critiques will be based on *constructive criticism*. Please inform me **immediately** if at any point during the class you become uncomfortable with feedback from peers or you observe behaviors that make you uncomfortable.
- **Ask questions:** If you have a question or don't understand something please let me know. I am more than willing to take as much time as necessary to help you understand a concept, but you have to ask!
- **Late work:** Once during the semester you may turn in late work for full credit. I will give you 48 hours to submit your work, no questions asked. Your assignment needs to be emailed to me, turned into my mailbox in the biology office, or submitted on BlazeVIEW. After your one late work turn-in, late assignments will not be accepted.
- **Email:** Use your VSU account for e-mail communication.
- **Lab/Recitation completion:** Lab/recitation attendance is mandatory and you must complete the entire lab/recitation in order to receive points for the assignment. During lab/recitation, expect to spend time working on your thesis. Therefore, you should arrive with the materials and resources you need to work (i.e. come to class prepared to write!).

- **Cheating:** You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the Undergraduate Catalogs that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. [The policies can be found at <http://valdosta.edu> under Student Code of Conduct.] If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with your instructor if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test. All forms of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to collusion, fabrication, cheating and plagiarism are worthy of punishment according to the policy set forth by Valdosta State University. This includes doing your own work on lab assignments. While you are allowed to brainstorm with each other, it is expected that your answers are your own. **I will not tolerate any form of cheating. This includes using AI to write your thesis!**

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities who are experiencing barriers in this course may contact the Access Office for assistance in determining and implementing reasonable accommodations. The Access Office is located in University Center Room 4136 Entrance 5. The phone numbers are 229-245-2498 (V), 229-375-5871. For more information, please visit [VSU's Access Office](#) or email: access@valdosta.edu

Title IX Statement: Valdosta State University (VSU) upholds all applicable laws and policies regarding discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex (including sexual harassment and pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, religion, age, veteran status, political affiliation, or disability. The University prohibits specific forms of behavior that violate Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities that receive federal funding. VSU considers sex discrimination in any form to be a serious offense. Title IX refers to all forms of sex discrimination committed against others, including but not limited to: sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, and sexual violence by other employees, students or third parties and gender inequity or unfair treatment based on an individual's sex/gender. The designated Title IX Coordinator for VSU is Mr. Darius Thomas. To view the full policy or to report an incident visit: <https://www.valdosta.edu/administration/student-affairs/title-ix/>

Grading Scale:

Letter	%	Points
A	90-100	117-130
B	80-89	104-116
C	70-79	91-103
D	60-69	78-90
F	<60	<77

Assessments: Each assignment is worth 10 points. All work is due 1 week after it has been assigned.

1. Writing schedule & list of achievable goals
2. Outlines
3. Methods draft
4. Methods revisions
5. Introduction draft
6. Introduction revisions
7. Results draft
8. Results revision
9. 5 abstracts & 5 titles
10. Abstract & title revisions
11. Discussion draft
12. Discussion revisions
13. Presentation
14. **BONUS ASSIGNMENT:** Send thesis draft to your advisor.

Schedule:

	Week	Lecture*	Lab/Recitation*	Assignment*
1	Jan 8	1. How to write a lot 2. Why do we write?	Goal setting	12-week schedule & goals, Tip sheet
2	Jan 15	3. Sticky stories 4. Managing structure	No Lab!	
3	Jan 22	5. Paragraph design 6. Favor the active voice	Outlines	Outline your thesis
4	Jan 29	7. Smart sentencing 8. Revisions Part 1	Methods workshop	Draft methods section
5	Feb 5	9. Revisions Part 2 10. Writer's Diet	Methods revisions	Finish methods revisions
6	Feb 12	11. How to be a good reviewer 12. Responses to reviewers	Introduction workshop	Draft introduction
7	Feb 19	13. Graphics for communication 14. Graphics for communication	Introduction revisions	Finish intro revisions
8	Feb 26	15. Dealing with limitations 16. How to choose a journal	Results workshop	Draft results
9	Mar 4	17. Citation Manager/Literature summary 18. Co-authorship	Results revisions	Finish results revision
10	Mar 11	Spring break		
11	Mar 18	19. Graphical Abstracts 20. Posters	Titles & abstracts workshop	Finish titles & abstracts
12	Mar 25	21. ABT 22. 3MT	Title & abstract revisions	Revise abstract & title
13	Apr 1	23. Promoting yourself 24. Writing for the public (blogs)	Discussion workshop	Draft discussion
14	Apr 8	25. Science outreach (radio) 26. Why Science writing sucks	Discussion revisions	Finish discussion revisions
15	Apr 15	27. Posters/presentations 28. Posters/presentations	Posters	Presentations
16	Apr 22	29. How to format your thesis 30. Format your thesis	Presentations	Bonus: Send thesis draft to your advisor!

*Subject to change.

Resources (this list is not comprehensive).

*** Lab/recitation and lecture content and activities will be based off of the following resources.

*Other great resources.

***Stylish Academic Writing by Helen Sword.

***Thriving as a Graduate Writer by Rachael Cayley.

***Writing Science. How to write papers that get cited and proposals that get funded by Joshua Schimel.

***Writing Science in Plain English by Anne E. Greene.

***The Scientist's Guide to Writing by Stephen B. Heard.

***How to Write a Lot by Paul Silvia.

***Don't Be *Such* a Scientist by Randy Olson.

***The Narrative Gym for Science Graduate Students by Randy Olson.

***Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success by Wendy Belcher.

***The Writer's Diet: A Guide to Fit Prose by Helen Sword.

***Fundamentals of Data Visualization by Claus O. Wilke

*On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft by Stephen King.

*If I Understood You, Would I have This Look On My Face? By Alan Alda.

*Houston, We Have a Narrative by Randy Olson.

*The Sense of Style by Stephen Pinker.

*They Say/ I Say by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein.

*How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper by Barbara Gastel and Robert A. Day.

*[blog: scientistseessquirrel.wordpress.com](http://scientistseessquirrel.wordpress.com)

*[blog: explorationsofstyle.com](http://explorationsofstyle.com)