

Writing Practicum
NROSCI 1800-1801
Course Information and Class Schedule
Fall 2015

“Everything should be made as simple as possible. But not simpler.”

Albert Einstein

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Course Description

Writing a scientific literature review is a rigorous intellectual exercise that requires an **ongoing and dynamic process** of **active self-directed** learning. An existing ability to use standard written English is expected.

This course helps familiarize students with the purpose, the process and the parts of writing a science literature review; the class adheres to a necessarily strict schedule of producing written work, receiving feedback and revising.

A student enrolled in the writing practicum **must** also be enrolled in a co-requisite neuroscience class because the neuroscience professor serves as an expert scientific reader and advisor for the paper.

The structure of the practicum mimics the process for submitting papers to scientific journals by including peer, expert and editorial review. As your writing instructor I serve a role similar to journal editor; I provide a structured process complete with detailed directions to help you write a review that is acceptable for “publication” – or in this case, a passing grade.

In case you are not aware, as a neuroscience major, your graduation from the program is contingent upon successful completion of this or an equivalent writing course.

Course Materials

I provide the syllabus, handouts and guidelines regarding the structure, style and content organization of your review. Your neuroscience professor’s syllabus will ideally provide a topic and issue for your review to focus on. There is no textbook; however I advise that you purchase a 3 ring binder in which to keep your drafts, source papers and class handouts neatly organized. If you wish to meet with me, you will need to bring this binder with you.

Purpose Overview

The purpose of a science literature review is not to demonstrate to your professor(s) that you have read a few papers or your textbook and can accurately regurgitate the information. Although this step is a prerequisite, the purpose of a literature review is to demonstrate your intellectual ability to synthesize and conceptualize, to make logical inferences despite incomplete information, to develop meaningful research questions and figure out a way to get answers.

A literature review provides an overview of the current state of knowledge of a particular issue or problem that is under study by experts. “Literature” means peer-reviewed papers reporting recent work and published in established medical or scientific journals in the relevant field. A review samples published papers to:

- Describe a problem or issue;
- Report upon the current state of knowledge from published, peer reviewed articles on same, and
- Synthesize the information in order to conceptualize additional direction for research.

Process Overview:

- Select a broad topic area appropriate to the co-requisite class;
- Use Pitt’s library resources to locate appropriate (current research) source material on the chosen topic;
- Read to learn: understand the problems and issues regarding your topic.
- Narrow the scope and focus of your paper to one particular problem or issue in your topic area;
- Create a rough draft, a.k.a., a preliminary outline with a working title, a draft introduction, thematically arranged subtitled sections, a discussion section placeholder, a conclusion section placeholder and an electronic reference list of source materials you have used;
- Write, edit and revise to develop a clear focus for your paper;
- Develop a discussion section that demonstrates critical analysis and conceptual understanding including a suggestion for new research;
- Revise drafts of assignments incorporating each reviewer’s feedback as appropriate; complete a final draft to deadline.

To achieve the goal of this course, you will need three discrete skills: one,

accurately reading, summarizing and reporting the work of others; and two, synthesizing and conceptualizing original questions and ways to get answers from the information and knowledge published by others. The third required skill is accurate and appropriate citation.

Graded Assignment Schedule

Assignments	Title	Due Date	Grade Weight %
<i>One</i>	<i>Introductory Paper</i>	See schedule	Pass/Fail
<i>Two</i>	<i>Informal written summaries (5)</i>	See schedule	Pass/Fail
<i>Three</i>	<i>First Rough Draft</i> <i>aka: A DETAILED OUTLINE: (Working title, draft introduction, & electronic references & thematic paper subtitles plus notes AND Scientific Advisor Sign-off)</i>	See schedule	30
<i>Four</i>	<i>Second Draft</i> (<i>Full Draft & Peer Review</i>)	See schedule	30 (20 for paper; 10 for peer review)
<i>Five</i>	<i>Signed Final Draft— & hand in via Turnitin.com</i>	See schedule	40

Grade Scale

Grades are not assigned on the point system. The grade you receive is qualitative and based on fulfilling the five main assignments **on time** and on the

criteria outlined in the qualitative grading rubric. You should be very familiar with the rubric. Use it to improve your own paper and to review your peer's paper.

Grade Discussion

If you wish to discuss your grade you must contact me within one week of receiving it. If you wish to withdraw from the course you must do so by the withdrawal date set by the University for the semester. No monitored withdrawal forms can be signed after that date.

Late Submission Grade Penalty

Late assignments are not accepted unless prior arrangements are made.

Class Policies

- Hand in work on time
- Format all your work according to the detailed format and structure guidelines provided; improperly formatted work will be handed back ungraded.
- Adhere to the draft/review/return schedule;
- Meet with your instructors as required;
- Plagiarism will result in an F grade for the class and be reported to the judicial board of the university with a recommendation for suspension.

Plagiarism

Your final paper must be handed in both hard-copy to my mailbox in A210 Langley Hall **and** online through turnitin.com. I also recommend you read Pitt's policy on plagiarism: <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>

Attendance

This is an online course. Please ensure your work arrives by 12 noon on Friday each week it is due. See attached schedule.

Instructor Availability

I do not have an office on campus. I ask you to communicate with me via email whenever possible; prm15@pitt.edu

Special Needs

If you have a physical or mental challenge for which you need a special accommodation contact the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union; phone: 412 648-7890, or TTY: 412 383-7355.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Activity	Assignment	Due
8/31	Read syllabus and course handouts. Obtain End-Note software, download it to your computer from My.Pitt.Edu	Read materials – e-mail me with any questions.	9/4
9/7	Introduce yourself to your co-requisite instructor to discuss potential topics for your review.	Write a brief introduction to yourself. Include a response to the course readings. Discuss your interests – potential topics and issues - from your co-requisite neuroscience course syllabus. All work must be double spaced. Arrange the above required content into whatever shape you see fit. Your ability to organize diverse content is part of the exercise.	9/11 Introductory paper due.
9/14	Explore the library system and begin to search out peer reviewed, published papers on your topic.	Read a peer reviewed published paper on your topic. Understand the difference between literature review papers and original reports of new work.	9/18
9/21	Identify a clear topic and issue for your paper. It's okay if this changes a little over the next few weeks.	Read a paper; write a summary & response. Add a paper to your Endnote Library.	9/25 First summary & response due.
9/28	Continue to explore your topic(s). Read & write	Read a paper; write a summary & response. Add the paper to your Endnote Library.	10/2 Second summary & response due
10/5	Continue to explore your topic(s). Read & write	Read a paper, write a summary & response. Add the paper to your Endnote Library.	10/9 Third summary & response due

Week	Activity	Assignment	Due
10/12	Continue to explore your topic(s). Read & write	Consider a title, subtitles and thematic organization for your paper. Add the paper to your Endnote Library.	10/16 Fourth summary & response due.
10/19	Continue to explore your topic(s). Read & write.	Prepare a rough draft of your rough draft.	10/23 Fifth summary & response due. Discuss your rough draft with your co-requisite instructor and get their feedback.
10/26	Prepare your first rough draft.	Write a title and a full 3 paragraph introduction for your rough draft. You may add bullet point ideas for all the other sections, but you should also add EndNote references to each section. A complete reference list is necessary so that your professors can provide guidance on additional sources which may be useful for you. You must get your co-requisite professor's signature on a hard copy of this paper and have it in my mailbox in A210 Langley by 11/6.	10/30 First Rough Draft – title, introduction, thematic subtitles, discussion, conclusion, references in EndNote. In addition to online hand in, this time also put a hard copy with your co-requisite instructor's signature in my mailbox in A210 Langley Hall.
11/2	Prepare the second draft.	Fill in the subtitled sections, compose the discussion, revise the introduction, write a conclusion	11/6
11/9	Prepare the second draft.	As above.	11/13 Second Draft – In addition to online hand-in place TWO copies of this draft in my mailbox – one for peer review. You will receive an

Week	Activity	Assignment	Due
			electronic copy and/or a hard copy of a peer's paper to review. Use the grading rubric to grade your peers' paper.
11/16	Prepare the Final Draft .	Revise all sections and title of your paper as necessary.	11/20
11/23	Thanksgiving Break		11/27
11/30	You will receive instructor and peer review with which to revise your Final Draft .	Revise as necessary. Ensure references are complete. Submit to Turnitin to check your similarity score (less than 25%) and get your co-requisite instructor's signature on a hard copy of your paper.	12/4 You will get your peer reviewed paper back as well as instructor feedback.
12/7	As above.	As above.	12/11 Final Draft – due by noon today via turnitin and a signed hardcopy in my mailbox in A210 Langley.