

BIO 9913 “Written Communication in Biology” Course Outline

1. Course Information

- Biology 9913 “Written Communication in Biology”
- Fall 2025
- 8 seminar sessions, each of 2h duration; location and day TBD
- Max enrolment: 20 students
- Open to students in any discipline or field in Biology

2. Instructor Information

Instructors	Email	Office	Phone	Office Hours
Professor Dave Coltman	dcoltman@uwo.ca	BGS 2064	780-918-3660	By appointment

3. Course Syllabus, Schedule, Delivery Mode

Course Description:

There are perhaps 3 million research papers published each year in over 30,000 peer-reviewed journals world-wide. Given this overloaded landscape of information, it is more critical that even to write papers that are succinct, clear and accessible to ensure that they reach the broadest possible target audience. While the ability to write with clarity and impact is a critical step in the research process, even experienced scientists can find that writing up their findings for publication in peer-reviewed journal intimidating, and we often feel that our work could be published in more impactful venues. Scientific writing is a skill that can be learned and practiced, and writing with improved clarity is one way to maximize the reach and impact of our research. This course aims to de-mystify the art of writing a scientific paper by going through each component of a paper intended for peer-review publication, from the cover letter to the discussion, using a simple framework that clarifies what needs to be included, where it needs to go, and using simple and concise language. The course relies primarily on the approach taken in the book “Scientific Papers Made Easy: How to Write with Clarity and Impact in the Life Sciences” by Stuart West and Lindsay Turnbull (ISBN: 9780192862785) which provides a framework and pointers for fixing common problems encountered in scientific writing. We will work our way through tips and tricks for preparing each component of a scientific paper, and each student will apply the principles learned to a paper of their own that they will work on throughout the semester. The main learning outcome of the course is to effectively communicate research findings in writing.

The course is intended to be delivered in a flipped format, where students read the chapters and complete exercises in advance of the class, then class time is used for discussion. Each student will also be expected to lead or co-lead one class session during the course.

Course outline (typically one class per week):

Class 1 (Chapters 1 & 2: Background & Core Skills)
Class 2 (Chapter 3: Methods)
Class 3 (Chapter 4: Results)
Class 4 (Chapter 5: Figures)
Class 5 (Chapter 6: Introductions)
Class 6 (Chapter 7: Discussions)
Class 7 (Chapter 8: Abstracts)
Class 8 (Chapters 9 & 11: Titles & Editing)

4. Course Materials

The course relies on “Scientific Papers Made Easy: How to Write with Clarity and Impact in the Life Sciences” by Stuart West and Lindsay Turnbull (ISBN: 9780192862792) which is freely available online from the Western Library or can be obtained in hard copy from Amazon.ca or OUP (30% off using **ASPROMP8** discount code).

All course material will be posted to OWL: <http://owl.uwo.ca>. Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<http://owl.uwo.ca>) on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the OWL Help page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

5. Methods of Evaluation

The overall course grade will be based on participation and written communication calculated as listed below:

Participation	20%	This will be based on attendance, completion of exercises, and constructive participation in class discussion.
Seminar	20%	This will be based on summarizing and presenting the course readings and leading the discussion during one class in the course. This may be done in pairs or small groups depending on the course enrollment.
Personal reflection	10%	This will be a short essay outlining the most important things that you learned from the course. Deadline: December 19, 2025.
Manuscript	50%	This will be based on the final manuscript and cover letter, in principle ready for submission to peer review, that you produce which incorporates the tips and tricks learned during the course. Deadline: December 19, 2025.

Use of Generative AI Tools

Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini) are prohibited for generating written assessments but may be used to augment the completion of ungraded exercises, preparation of class discussion materials and for brainstorming. The boundaries of acceptable AI use will be discussed in class.

General information about missed coursework

While the Participation grade is partly based on class attendance, and attendance at all classes is expected, in the event one class is missed due to extenuating circumstances the Participation grade will be re-weighted based on the classes attended without requiring supporting documentation

A missed seminar or failure to submit written work on time, in the absence of supporting documentation outlining compelling extenuating circumstances, will result in a grade of 0.

6. Additional Statements

6.1 Religious Accommodation

When conflicts arise with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request an accommodation for their absence in writing to the course instructor and/or the Academic Advising office of their Faculty of Registration. This notice should be

made as early as possible, but not later than two weeks prior to the writing of the examination (or one week prior to the writing of the test).

Please visit the Diversity Calendars posted on our university's EDID website for the recognized religious holidays - <https://www.edi.uwo.ca>

6.2 Academic Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic Accommodation_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf).

6.3 General Academic Policies The website for Registrar Services is <https://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>.

Use of @uwo.ca email: In accordance with policy, https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf, the centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university email address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that emails received from the University at their official university address are attended to in a timely manner.

Requests for Relief (formally known as "appeals")

Policy on Request for Relief from Academic Decision:

https://uwo.ca/univsec//pdf/academic_policies/appeals/requests_for_relief_from_academic_decisions.pdf

Procedures on Request for Relief from Academic Decision (Undergraduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec//pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_requests_for_relief_procedure.pdf

[If cross-listed as a grad course] Procedures on Request for Relief from Academic Decision (Graduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec//pdf/academic_policies/appeals/graduate_requests_for_relief_procedure.pdf

6.4 Scholastic Offences

Policy on Scholastic Offences:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

Procedures on Scholastic Offences (Graduate):

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/graduate_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf