

Writing a Lab Report

Adapted from Laboratory Manual for Physics 51a

T. A. Moore, and A. C. Zook, Pomona College, (1994)

In this course I expect you to write lab reports in the style of a real scientific paper. Papers in scientific journals are the medium by which scientists communicate and attempt to convince the scientific community of the validity of their experiments and ideas. Thus, they should be written in a way that convinces the reader that the work is interesting and should be taken seriously. You should do the same.

You may feel that comparing your lab work and the resulting report to “real” science that appears in journals is a bit pretentious, since you’re not going to be doing much cutting-edge physics in a required undergraduate laboratory course. The purpose of the lab reports, though, is not so much to see if you did bold, original work, or even to see if you did the experiment “right” (although it will serve this purpose), as it is to give you practice in writing scientific reports, so that you’ll be able to do it well when you *do* do bold, original work.

Do not reference my lab handouts. If you wish to reference a journal article or a book, place a sequentially numbered reference at the end of the sentence like this. [1] At the end of the report, but before the figures, include a separate page labeled “references”. The format for a journal article reference is:

[1] Author list, *Title*, Journal, **Volume**, Page, (Year).

For a book, the format is:

[2] Author list, Title, Editor ed., (Publisher, City, Year) Page.

I will expect your lab reports to be well-written, proofread, and to follow the format discussed below: