Department of Chemistry

Writing Assessment Rubrics

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Department of Chemistry

Writing Skills Developed by Year for Laboratory/Research Reports

Freshman Level
• State the hypothesis.
• Summarize the purpose of the experiment.
• Explain what experiments will be done to test the hypothesis.
• Reflect on how the outcome of the experiment relates to the hypothesis.
• Use correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and coherent writing.

Sophomore/Junior Level
• Emphasis on writing a results section that includes text, figures, schematics and tables.
• Error analysis is required.
• The data should be analyzed in a Discussion section.
• A Title and Abstract are included.
• Experimental data should be interpreted to support or refute the hypothesis.
• Narrative coherence is expected, with good organization, appropriate transitions and clear, concise sentences.

Senior Level
• A formal lab report is expected.
• The introduction should tie theory and a broader conceptual framework into the context of the study.
• Experimental design is stressed in independent projects in capstone courses.
• The report should have a clear, concise experimental methods section.
• Every aspect of the experiment should be explained.
• The Discussion section should be linked to the Introduction.
• Positive and negative findings are interpreted within the context of established theory and textbook facts.
• Demonstration of critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration is required.
• Succinct writing will be emphasized, with all rules of grammar and usage followed.
# Learning Outcomes for Chemistry Majors - Writing Skills Development

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Keep copies of capstone report as record of measurable final learning outcome on scientific writing skills
Chemistry Guide to Writing Laboratory and Research Reports
Written laboratory reports and research projects are written in the style of a science article and are comprised of the following sections; Title and Abstract, Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusion, and Bibliography. The following describes the ideal lab or research report:

Title
- Describes the specific content of the lab or research work concisely but with enough detail to get the main ideas across to the reader.
- Title clearly states what new information was learned or concluded in the study.
- Title contains key words and is concise.

Abstract
- The abstract contains a short summary of the study and describes what was accomplished and how it was accomplished. Each section of the report is summarized in one or two sentences.
- The hypothesis and the experimental methodology used to test the hypothesis are stated clearly along with a rationale as to why the study was conducted.
- The major findings of the study are given, without elaborate discussion, followed by a one sentence conclusion.

Introduction
- Introduction ties theory and a broader conceptual framework into the context of the proposed study. The learning context for the lab is clearly established.
- Background information required to understand the problem is provided and referenced. In more sophisticated labs or research, pertinent scientific literature is reviewed.
- Goals of the lab are clearly stated (The objectives of the lab procedure and the overall purpose are linked to the learning context).
- The hypothesis is clearly stated. Logical reasoning is provided for the hypothesis. Hypothesis is related to accepted theory and previous work.
- A conceptual framework is given for all methodologies used.
- Experimental design provides a critical test of the hypothesis.
- All aspects of the experiment are clearly explained.

Materials and Methods
- Methodologies for all measurements are accurately described and sufficient detail is given such that the experiment can be repeated by other competent scientists.
- All materials, reagents and/or equipment are identified.
- All quantities, compositions, concentrations, times, temperatures, etc. are accurately specified.
- All aspects of the experimental protocol should be clearly and concisely stated and explained. Unnecessary details are avoided.
• All statistical tests and calculations are described.
• Data and interpretations are not offered.

Results
• Opens with effective statement of overall findings.
• Data is summarized and presented clearly, accurately, and without redundancy in appropriate visuals (figures, tables, flow charts, etc).
  o Figures and Tables are correctly labeled, and contain informative legends or keys.
  o Independent variable appears on x axis, dependent variable on y axis.
  o Graphs contain regular divisions, correct scaling, and proper use of space.
  o Curves contain best fit lines with standard error bars if appropriate.
• Includes verbal descriptions of the summary or important findings for each visual.
• Presents verbal and observational findings clearly and with sufficient support.
• Successfully integrates verbal and visual representations.
• If appropriate, quantified data is correctly calculated and statistically analyzed.
• Data trends and findings are stated clearly. Data is analyzed but not interpreted.

Discussion and conclusion
• Data is interpreted in light of original hypothesis. Student provides sufficient and logical explanation for effective comparison of results and hypothesis.
• Positive and negative findings are interpreted within the context of established theory.
• All relevant information is extracted from data.
• The significance of the data is described and related to current understanding of the topic as presented in the introduction.
• Explanations are offered for any observations that were not expected.
• Alternative explanations are given and future work is discussed or proposed. Student sufficiently addresses other issues pertinent to the lab.
• Student directly addresses what has been learned in the lab and gives a clear and accurate conclusion.

Bibliography
• All sources are listed in correct format. Multiple references are used.

Presentation
• Writing is grammatically correct with proper syntax, spelling, and style.
• Writing is clear, succinct, and coherent.
• Student demonstrates clear and thoughtful scientific inquiry and/or demonstrates that he/she has successfully learned what the lab is designed to teach.
• Communicates knowledge of the purpose and design of the study that shows the student fully understands the work and has made the ideas of the writing their own.
• Protocol writing is clear, concise and non repetitive. Past tense is used.
• Discussion narrative contains significant evidence of thought, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration.
• Uses scientific terminology that is both technically correct and enhances the quality of the writing.

**Chemistry Writing Rubric for Laboratory and Research Reports**

Written laboratory reports and research projects will be written in the style of a science article and will be comprised of the following sections; Title and Abstract, Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusion, and Bibliography. Reports will be assessed using the following writing rubric.

A paper earning the grade of A or A- does most or all of the following:

**Title**
- Describes the specific content of the lab or research work concisely but with enough detail to get the main ideas across to the reader.
- Title clearly states what new information was learned or concluded in the study.
- Title contains key words and is concise.

**Abstract**
- The abstract contains a short summary of the study and describes what was accomplished and how it was accomplished. Each section of the report is summarized in one or two sentences.
- The hypothesis and the experimental methodology used to test the hypothesis are stated clearly along with a rationale as to why the study was conducted.
- The major findings of the study are given, without elaborate discussion, followed by a one sentence conclusion.

**Introduction**
- Introduction ties theory and a broader conceptual framework into the context of the proposed study. The learning context for the lab is clearly established.
- Background information required to understand the problem is provided and referenced. In more sophisticated labs or research, pertinent scientific literature is reviewed.
- Goals of the lab are clearly stated (The objectives of the lab procedure and the overall purpose are linked to the learning context).
- The hypothesis is clearly stated. Logical reasoning is provided for the hypothesis. Hypothesis is related to accepted theory and previous work.
- A conceptual framework is given for all methodologies used.
- Experimental design provides a critical test of the hypothesis.
- All aspects of the experiment are clearly explained.

**Materials and Methods**
- Methodologies for all measurements are accurately described and sufficient detail is given such that the experiment can be repeated by other competent scientists.
• All materials, reagents and/or equipment are identified.
• All quantities, compositions, concentrations, times, temperatures, etc. are accurately specified.
• All aspects of the experimental protocol should be clearly and concisely stated and explained. Unnecessary details are avoided.
• All statistical tests and calculations are described.
• Data and interpretations are not offered.

Results
• Opens with effective statement of overall findings.
• Data is summarized and presented clearly, accurately, and without redundancy in appropriate visuals (figures, tables, flow charts, etc).
  o Figures and Tables are correctly labeled, and contain informative legends or keys.
  o Independent variable appears on x axis, dependent variable on y axis.
  o Graphs contain regular divisions, correct scaling, and proper use of space.
  o Curves contain best fit lines with standard error bars if appropriate.
• Includes verbal descriptions of the summary or important findings for each visual.
• Presents verbal and observational findings clearly and with sufficient support.
• Successfully integrates verbal and visual representations.
• If appropriate, quantified data is correctly calculated and statistically analyzed.
• Data trends and findings are stated clearly. Data is analyzed but not interpreted.

Discussion and conclusion
• Data is interpreted in light of original hypothesis. Student provides sufficient and logical explanation for effective comparison of results and hypothesis.
• Positive and negative findings are interpreted within the context of established theory.
• All relevant information is extracted from data.
• The significance of the data is described and related to current understanding of the topic as presented in the introduction.
• Explanations are offered for any observations that were not expected.
• Alternative explanations are given and future work is discussed or proposed. Student sufficiently addresses other issues pertinent to the lab.
• Student directly addresses what has been learned in the lab and gives a clear and accurate conclusion.

Bibliography
• All sources are listed in correct format. Multiple references are used.

Presentation
• Writing is grammatically correct with proper syntax, spelling, and style.
• Writing is clear, succinct, and coherent.
• Student demonstrates clear and thoughtful scientific inquiry and/or demonstrates that he/she has successfully learned what the lab is designed to teach.
Communicates knowledge of the purpose and design of the study that shows the student fully understands the work and has made the ideas of the writing their own.

Protocol writing is clear, concise and non-repetitive. Past tense is used.

Discussion narrative contains significant evidence of thought, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration.

Uses scientific terminology that is both technically correct and enhances the quality of the writing.

A paper earning the grade of B+ to B- does most or all of the following:

Title
- Adequately describes the specific content of the lab or research work.
- Title states what new information was learned or concluded in the study.

Abstract
- The abstract contains a short summary of the study. All sections are represented.
- The hypothesis and the experimental methodology used to test the hypothesis are adequately stated along with a rationale as to why the study was conducted.
- The major findings of the study are summarized but without specific conclusions.

Introduction
- Introduction tries to tie theory and a broader conceptual framework into the context of the proposed study. The learning context for the lab is adequately established.
- Background information required to understand parts of the problem are provided and some sources are cited. In more sophisticated labs or research, scientific literature is reviewed but not in a thorough way.
- Goals of the lab are adequately stated.
- The hypothesis is stated.
- A conceptual framework is given for most of the methodologies used. Not all theory is discussed in detail.
- Experimental design is adequate and all aspects of the experiment are explained.

Materials and Methods
- Methodologies for all measurements are described and most of the details are given such that the experiment can be repeated by other people.
- Most all materials, reagents and/or equipment are identified.
- Most all quantities, compositions, concentrations, times, temperatures, etc. are accurately specified.
- All aspects of the experimental protocol are stated and explained. Unnecessary details are kept to a few instances.
- Statistical tests and calculations are described but are not sufficient for the experiment.
- Some data or observations may be mentioned.
Results

- Data is summarized and presented adequately in appropriate visuals (figures, tables, flow charts, etc).
  - Figures and Tables are for the most part correctly labeled, and contain informative legends or keys.
  - Independent variable appears on x axis, dependent variable on y axis.
  - Graphs are labeled and for the most part contain regular divisions, correct scaling, and proper use of space.
  - Curves contain best fit lines with standard error bars if appropriate.
- Each visual is summarized.
- Presents verbal and observational findings but lacks sufficient support.
- If appropriate, quantified data is calculated and statistically analyzed.
- Data trends and findings are stated.

Discussion and conclusion

- Data is interpreted in light of original hypothesis. Student provides adequate explanation for comparison of results and hypothesis.
- Positive and negative findings are interpreted.
- Most relevant information is extracted from data.
- An attempt is made to describe the significance of the data.
- Alternative explanations are mentioned and future work is suggested.
- Student addresses other issues pertinent to the lab.
- Student addresses what has been learned in the lab and gives an accurate conclusion.

Bibliography

- All sources are listed in correct format.

Presentation

- Writing is mostly grammatically correct with some syntax, spelling, and style errors but not enough to interfere with the meaning of the writing.
- Writing is coherent but often wordy stale.
- Student demonstrates thoughtful scientific inquiry and/or demonstrates that he/she has learned what the lab is designed to teach.
- Communicates knowledge of the purpose and design of the study. The student understands the work but does not demonstrate clear ownership of the topic.
- Protocol writing is complete but often redundant. Past tense is used.
- Discussion narrative contains evidence of thought, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration.
- Uses scientific terminology that is technically correct and strengthens the quality of the writing.
A paper earning the grade of C+ to C- does most or all of the following:

Title
• Title is vague and does not get the main point of the experiment across to the reader.

Abstract
• Abstract is present but lacks focus and is wordy.
• The hypothesis and experimental methodology are not clearly stated.
• The purpose of the experiment is described but not in sufficient detail.
• Findings of the study are given but are generalized and unspecific.

Introduction
• Background information provides functional support that is mostly related to the purpose of the report. The learning context for the lab is sufficiently established.
• Few sources are cited. In more sophisticated labs or research, scientific literature is not adequately reviewed.
• Goals of the lab are sufficiently stated but gaps and misunderstandings are evident.
• The hypothesis is stated but may not be valid.
• A conceptual framework is given for some of the methodologies used. Not all theory is discussed and some information is incorrect.
• Experimental design is sufficient but not all aspects of the experiment are explained.

Materials and Methods
• Methodologies for most all measurements are described. Important details needed to reproduce the experiment are missing.
• Some of the materials, reagents and/or equipment are identified.
• Most all quantities, compositions, concentrations, times, temperatures, etc. are specified but not all accurately.
• Most aspects of the experimental protocol are stated and explained. Unnecessary details are common.
• Statistical tests and calculations are incorrectly described.
• Sections are missing or irrelevant sections are present.

Results
• Data is summarized and sufficiently presented in appropriate visuals (figures, tables, flow charts, etc).
  o Figures and Tables are labeled, and contain legends or keys but mistakes are evident.
  o Independent variable may appear on x or y axis.
  o Graphs are incorrectly labeled and do not always contain regular divisions, correct scaling, or proper use of space.
  o Curves do not contain best fit lines and standard error bars are missing.
• Each visual is poorly summarized.
• Findings lack sufficient support.
• Quantified data is calculated incorrectly and statistical analysis is not appropriate.
• Data trends and findings are mostly stated but mistakes are made.

Discussion and conclusion
• Data is interpreted in light of original hypothesis. Student provides sufficient explanation for comparison of results and hypothesis.
• Positive and negative findings are mentioned.
• Some relevant information is extracted from data.
• An attempt is made to explain the significance of the data.
• Future work is suggested but not in any detail.
• Conclusion is simply a restatement of the purpose of the report.

Bibliography
• All sources are listed but not necessarily in correct format.

Presentation
• Writing contains some errors in grammar, punctuation, syntax, and/or spelling that interfere with the meaning of the writing.
• Writing is often lacking in coherence.
• Student demonstrates some scientific inquiry and/or demonstrates that he/she has learned mostly what the lab is designed to teach.
• Communicates knowledge of the purpose and design of the study. The student has some knowledge of the work but it adds nothing to the topic.
• Protocol writing is not complete and is often redundant. Various tense are used.
• Discussion narrative contains some evidence of thought, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration.
• Uses scientific terminology that is somewhat correct but may interfere with the meaning of the writing.

A paper earning the grade of D+ to D- does most or all of the following:

Title
• Title is misleading

Abstract
• Abstract is present but lacks focus and is wordy.
• The hypothesis and experimental methodology are misstated.
• The purpose of the experiment is described but in such a way as to confuse the reader.
• Findings of the study are missing or incorrect.

Introduction
• Background information is off topic. The learning context for the lab is not well established.
• Sources are not cited or are cited incorrectly. In more sophisticated labs or research, scientific literature is reviewed but off topic.
• Goals of the lab are not sufficiently stated. Gaps and misunderstandings are evident.
• The hypothesis is misstated or invalid.
• A conceptual framework is given for some of the methodologies used. Theory is clearly not understood and some information is incorrect.
• Experimental design is not sufficient and not all aspects of the experiment are explained.

Materials and Methods
• Methodologies for some of the measurements are described. Important details needed to reproduce the experiment are missing or are misleading.
• Some of the materials, reagents and/or equipment are either not identified or are identified incorrectly.
• Some of the quantities, compositions, concentrations, times, temperatures, etc. are specified but not all accurately.
• Some aspects of the experimental protocol are stated. Explanations are often incorrect. Unnecessary details are common.
• Statistical tests and calculations are missing or incorrectly described.
• Sections are missing or irrelevant sections are present.

Results
• Data tables and graphs are unclear and distracting; visuals are distracting or irrelevant to the purpose of the report.
  o Figures and Tables are missing or contain many mistakes.
  o Graphs are incorrectly labeled and do not always contain regular divisions, correct scaling, or proper use of space.
  o Curves do not contain best fit lines and standard error bars are missing.
• Visual are poorly summarized.
• Findings are not supported.
• Quantified data is calculated incorrectly and statistical analysis is missing.
• Data trends and findings are not clearly stated and mistakes are made.

Discussion and conclusion
• Data is interpreted incorrectly. Student provides insufficient explanation for comparison of results and hypothesis.
• Gives shallow, incomplete explanations of data.
• Not all findings are mentioned.
• Little relevant information is extracted from data.
• Attempts to explain the significance of the data are off topic.
• Conclusion is simply a restatement of the purpose of the report.

Bibliography
• Not all sources are listed, format is not correct.
Presentation

- Writing mixes future, present and past tense.
- Writing contains some errors in grammar, punctuation, syntax, and/or spelling that interfere with the meaning of the writing.
- Enough missing parts to interfere with the meaning of the writing.
- Student demonstrates little scientific inquiry and/or demonstrates that he/she has not learned what the lab is designed to teach.
- Communicates little knowledge of the purpose and design of the study. The student’s ideas appear to belong to someone else.
- Protocol writing is not complete and full of errors.
- Discussion narrative contains little evidence of thought, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration.
- Uses scientific terminology that is somewhat correct but may interfere with the meaning of the writing.

A paper earning the grade of F does most or all of the following:

Title
- Title is missing or communicates no findings.

Abstract
- Abstract is incomplete, unclear and poorly organized.
- The experiment is not described in any detail.
- The hypothesis and experimental methodology are not stated.
- Findings of the study are absent and the conclusion is off topic.

Introduction
- Background information is missing or off topic. The learning context for the lab is nonexistent.
- Sources are not cited. In more sophisticated labs or research, scientific literature is not adequately.
- Goals of the lab are missing or not sufficiently stated. Gaps and misunderstandings are the norm.
- The hypothesis is missing.
- A conceptual framework is not given for the methodologies used. Theory is clearly not understood and most information is incorrect.
- Experimental design is not sufficient and the experiment is not explained.

Materials and Methods
- Methodologies for the measurements are not described. Important details needed to reproduce the experiment are missing or are misleading.
- Most of the materials, reagents and/or equipment are either not identified or are identified incorrectly.
• Most of the quantities, compositions, concentrations, times, temperatures, etc. are either not specified or are not accurate.
• Experimental protocol is not stated in any detail. Statistical tests and calculations are missing or incorrectly described.
• Sections are missing and irrelevant sections are present.

Results
• Important data tables and graphs are missing and/or unclear.
  o Figures and Tables are missing or contain many mistakes.
  o Graphs are incorrectly labeled and do not always contain regular divisions, correct scaling, or proper use of space.
  o Curves do not contain best fit lines and standard error bars are missing.
• Visual are not summarized.
• Findings are not supported.
• Quantified data is calculated incorrectly and statistical analysis is missing.
• Data trends and findings are not stated.

Discussion and conclusion
• Little or no attempt is made to interpret data.
• Not all findings are mentioned.
• Little or no relevant information is extracted from data.
• Attempts to explain the significance of the data are off topic.
• No conclusions of interest are made.

Bibliography
• Cited works are omitted.

Presentation
• Writing mixes, future, present and past tense.
• There are so many errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling that the writing is impossible to understand.
• No discernible purpose or organization to the writing.
• Student demonstrates that he/she has not learned what the lab is designed to teach.
• Communicates little knowledge of the purpose and design of the study. The student’s ideas appear to belong to someone else.
• Protocol writing is full of errors.
• Discussion narrative contains no evidence of thought, critical thinking, analysis, interpretation and integration.
• Makes no attempt to use scientific terminology.
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
WRITING ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Developed by the Department of English

Adopted by Dept. of Chemistry for assessing research papers
(non-laboratory based work i.e. not for laboratory/research reports)

March 2005

Excellent (A to A-): "The A paper leaves the reader feeling bright, thoroughly satisfied and eager to reread the piece" (Lindemann 33). Such a paper will display strength in each category below:

- **Development**: original and insightful development of the topic through a specific, complex and argumentative thesis, supported by well-chosen examples, persuasive reasoning and thorough analysis
- **Organization**: engaging organization with paragraphs arranged in a particularly logical and effective manner, linked by appropriate, clear and smooth transitions
- **Expression**: inventive and memorable sentence structure; fresh, highly specific diction; mastery of mechanics; no major errors and/or no more than two or three minor errors (see list below)

Good (B+ to B-): "The B paper makes the reading experience a pleasurable one, for it offers substantial information with few distractions" (Lindemann 33). This paper will show proficiency in each category below:

- **Development**: convincing development of the topic through a specific, clear and argumentative thesis, supported by several clear examples, logical reasoning and careful analysis of a few points, each developed at length
- **Organization**: clear organization with paragraphs arranged logically and coherently, linked by smooth transitions
- **Expression**: fluid sentence structure; vivid, vigorous diction; minimal mechanical errors; no more than one or two major errors and/or few minor errors (see list below).

Adequate (C+ to C-): "The C paper, while it gets the job done, lacks both imagination and intellectual rigor, and hence does not invite a rereading" (Lindemann 33). Such a paper displays the following characteristics:

- **Development**: general or partial development of the topic through an arguable thesis, supported by adequate examples, plausible reasoning but sometimes
predictable arguments or shallow analysis, elaborating at length on at least one point

- **Organization:** formulaic organization with competent but mechanical paragraphing; transitions present, but sometimes awkward or clumsy
- **Expression:** predictable sentence structure; general, repetitious, conventional or formulaic diction; some mechanical problems that do not interfere with coherence; two or more major errors and/or several minor errors (see list below)

**Unsatisfactory (D+ to D-):** "The D paper often gives the impression of having been conceived and written in haste" (Lindemann 32). This essay displays the following characteristics:

- **Development:** ineffective or basic engagement with the topic, with thesis either missing, too vague, or too commonplace to be argued; insufficient or awkward support; flawed or illogical reasoning with scanty development; may predominantly narrate or summarize
- **Organization:** lack of control of organization evident in rudimentary paragraphing with missing or ineffective transitions, resulting in overall lack of coherence
- **Expression:** reliance on simple or awkward sentence structure; inappropriate diction; three or more major errors and/or numerous minor errors (see list below); and flawed or ineffective interpretation of the topic or text with inappropriate use of supporting evidence. If outside sources are used, citations may be missing or incorrect.

**Failing (F):** "The ideas, organization, and style [of the F paper] fall far below what is acceptable . . . writing" (Lindemann 32). This essay displays the following characteristics:

- **Development:** presents only a superficial engagement with the topic with no discernible thesis; little or no development of the topic or text with failure to use supporting evidence meaningfully; often repetitious
- **Organization:** lack of discernible organization with underdeveloped paragraphs and missing, minimal or faulty use of transitions
- **Expression:** garbled or seriously limited sentence structure; elementary or faulty diction containing childish or imprecise wording; four or more major errors and/or excessive minor errors (see list below)
MAJOR GRAMMATICAL/USAGE ERRORS:

Sentence Structure: fragments; comma splices; fused or run-on sentences; mixed construction sentences; faulty parallelism.

Agreement: subject and verb; pronoun and antecedent.

Spelling: misspelling any key word of the literary work (title words, author's name, characters' names, etc.); two other misspelled words equal one major error.

Verb Usage: tense; voice; mood

MINOR GRAMMATICAL/USAGE ERRORS:

Person: inappropriate shifts in person

Diction: use of contractions, slang, symbols, abbreviations; misuse of standard idioms and commonly confused words.

Miscellaneous punctuation: titles of published works; apostrophes; colons.

Note: Repetition of minor grammatical/usage errors in subsequent papers constitutes a major error.

Parts of the above material have been adapted from the following sources:
