

Physics for future Presidents

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Some hints for how to get a good grade on your essays

Many of your assignments will involve writing short essays. If no explicit grading criteria are given with the assignment, you should keep the following general guidelines in mind as you complete your essay.

1. **Assignment is complete** (40 Points)

You can receive 40 points if you make sure that you have completed the assignment and you turn it in on time. Consider re-reading and spell-checking the assignment before turning in your work. Have you completed everything requested? If you start working on your assignment early to avoid last-minute snafus, this should be an easy 40 points.

2. **Writing is clear, correct, and precise** (30 Points)

Your writing has to be clear. If we don't understand one of your statements or we have to guess at your meaning, you'll lose points in this category. *Of course, your statements have to be true.* It is OK to discuss controversial topics and there may be times that you want to introduce your own opinion, but in these cases you must make it clear that you are expressing your point of view and differentiate this from your discussion of hard facts. Be careful on how you write and you should get most of these points. However, *precision* is a more delicate issue. Try to avoid vague statements. This is a physics class. Be quantitative whenever possible. For example, one of your essays might involve a discussion of a radiation leak from a nuclear reactor. A statement that the radiation leak was "large" is not a very useful piece of information, unless you follow it up with additional discussion. Can you quantify the amount of radiation? Can you compare it to other nuclear accidents? Can you relate it to possible human health effects or damage to the environment?

3. **Writing demonstrates depth and insight** (30 Points)

We choose an assignment because we think that you can learn something from it. However, you can thwart our good intentions by putting insufficient effort into your work. We want to see some indication that your brain has been engaged. For example, if we ask you to find a news article that relates to our class discussions, you might pick the first article you find that has some remote connection to class discussion and simply write a short summary of the article. But we already know you can read, so don't expect to pick up any "depth and insight" points if this is all you do. Work a little harder and find an article that really connects to our discussions. Exactly what topics in our course are related to the news article? We want to see how you can use your skills and knowledge to extend your understanding of the news article. If the article is vague, can your summary be improved with a bit of internet research to fill in the gaps or add a more scientific perspective?