

JANET CONRAD: So the students are also expected to write papers. The papers are in the format of Physical Review Letters, which I think is a really valuable thing for a couple of reasons. First of all, they actually learn what's called LaTeX which is the system of laying out the papers. Also, they discover how incredibly hard it is to fit what you have done into four pages. And I'm pretty strict, they have to follow the PRL guidelines.

They're not allowed to go over on their papers. But they also learn a lot about what the elements of a paper are. Like for example, how do you write an abstract? A lot of people have trouble writing an abstract. They don't want to give the answer away early, and the abstract has the answer in it. So they are-- so they're really bothered by doing that.

They also tend to write these more like you would write a book report. So they have a whole history section at the beginning, which is not what a paper is about. And so I think it's really a very valuable experience for them to learn to write. I really like teaching writing. I actually teach a writing course here that's a communications intensive in the major.

So I'm a little bit unusual this way. I don't mind grading all of the papers, which I think that a lot of people don't want to teach Junior Lab because they don't want to be faced with grading these papers. But I think we've got a very good way of doing it. We have a rubric, and the rubric is what we use to make sure that we try to stay as even as we can on all of the students.

All the students have the rubric also. It always makes me laugh, because I hand out the rubric. I say, this is what I'm grading you on, and then the first paper comes in for the short labs. And of course, they haven't read the rubric and check the paper against it. And luckily, that paper doesn't count for anything, because I always write across the top, if you read the rubric you would find out that you need this, like a section on your errors, or things like that.

And I think that the students really liked that aspect of it. Another thing that I do to try to make sure that all the grading is even and fair is that I grade all of the papers and mark them up. And also, my TA grades all of the papers, and marks them up. And then we get together, and we compare notes, and make sure that we've seen the same things in them, and decide on what the grade is going to be.