



Student Reporter Guide

Introduction

One of the most important skills to develop while in college is the ability to communicate clearly, concisely and accurately. As an SPS member, you have an outstanding opportunity to hone your communication skills as a reporter.

A student reporter is given \$200 for a report on a meeting they attend, with photos. Chapters can receive up to \$600 depending on the number of individuals working on the report. Through this guide, we'll show you how to create a great article and take pictures that pop.

We'll go through:

- The parts of an article
- Interviewing tips
- How to make your story really shine

What Does a Meeting Report Need?

Much like a research paper, a meeting report needs many distinct parts. Unlike a research paper, you (almost certainly) won't be formatting those parts with separate headings and subheadings. Your story should flow naturally from one piece to the next.

Parts of a Report

1. Introduction

- Grab the reader! Think beyond the basic, "My name is Janet, I am a physics major, and I attended the APS March Meeting this year."
- Instead, try:
 - A story: "The sun was blazing hot as I stepped out of the airport, luggage in hand, for my first March Meeting. But the sun wasn't the only reason I was sweating. It was also my first-time presenting research at a real physics conference, and I was nervous!"
 - A surprising fact or statistic. "How many physicists does it take to estimate the mass of the Higgs Boson? According to a paper in Physical Review Letters, 5,154."
 - A quote. (If you do this, make sure it's a great quote!) "My goal is simple," said Stephen Hawking as he opened his plenary speech. "It is a complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all."

2. Describe the session/conference in more detail

- Include stories and details!
- This is good: "Dr. Brown, a physicist at Really Important Lab in Hill Valley, California, described in his talk how his team pulled all-nighters for weeks to develop a way to disperse extra energy safely before finally announcing they had invented the flux capacitor."



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- This is bad: “A physicist from a lab in California talked about how he invented the flux capacitor.”
- Are you writing about a poster session? Try to describe the range of topics briefly, then focus in on at least one poster (2-3 is better)!

3. *Describe main takeaways*

- What did you find most interesting? Why? What information would be useful to take back to your SPS chapter or zone?
- Again, details are good.
- This is good:
“I enjoyed the talk immensely because while I haven’t studied time travel yet in my undergraduate courses, it’s something I hope to focus on next year. Dr. Brown did an excellent job of explaining his research at a level that undergraduates could follow.”
- This is bad:
“I thought the talk was interesting and I enjoyed it.”

4. *Get student reactions to the session (yours or others)*

- Feel free to ask other students what they thought.

5. *Conclusion*

- Write a conclusion that sums up your experience at the panel/plenary talk/conference.

Other Things to Obtain DURING the Conference

For any speaker/presenter, make sure to get their full name and title/affiliation. This will usually be printed on the program materials, but if not, take a picture of their first slide (usually has title/contact info on it) or ask for a business card after the session.

What’s in a GOOD Article?

Contains quotes!

- Direct quotes give life to stories. If you’re worried about accurate quote transcription, record your conversation (ask first, though).
- This is good:
We asked Martin McFly, a junior at Hill Valley University, what he thought of the plenary, and he said, “It was heavy! I learned a lot about steam engines. I’m definitely going to have our chapter set up a related experiment when I get back.”
- This is bad:
When we asked Martin McFly what he thought of the speech, he said he enjoyed it and learned a lot about steam engines.

YOUR impressions—what stood out, what was most interesting to you, what did you learn? Why was it interesting?



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- Your thoughts and opinions don't have to be entirely limited to physics. Maybe part of the conference you attended included a fun trivia night or a tour of a cultural site.
- Maybe you tried stewed snails for the first time. Feel free to tell us about fun stories like that. But you should have at least some physics in your report (don't spend the entire report telling us how delicious the food was)!

A good article is written at a level that undergraduates can understand.

- Remember that not all students will have taken the same classes as you and might need background to get up to speed.
- Maybe you attended a talk on non-Newtonian fluids: Tell us what a non-Newtonian fluid is and why a non-Newtonian fluid is interesting before you lead into what the speaker said about new research.
- Use pop culture references if you like. Pretend you're explaining the concepts to your grandmother—assuming your grandmother doesn't have a Ph.D. In physics!

A good article is not too short, but not too long, either.

- Aim for 1,000 words, but it's fine to finish anywhere between 750 and 1250 words.

A good article has a unified voice. If multiple reporters are collaborating on an article, make sure the piece is written so that it sounds like one person is "talking."

- For example, James, Suzie and Stephen attended PhysCon together. When they got there, they attended the same plenary talk, given by the glowing ghost of Marie Curie.
- This is good:
We three students attended the talk by Marie Curie's ghost and found her ideas very interesting, although hard to understand because she only spoke French.
- This is bad:
I (James) attended the talk by Marie Curie's ghost with two other students. I (Suzie) thought she was hard to understand. I (Stephen) left halfway through the talk.

If you must individualize your writing (because you did not all do the same thing), talk about yourselves in the third person.

- Example:
We attended the talk by Marie Curie's ghost. James thought it was interesting, but Suzie couldn't understand a word of it.

Interviewing tips

You may find yourself interviewing speakers, presenters, and/or fellow students. Here are some tips to make your interview great.

- Consider recording the interview (ask first). There are lots of phone apps that will record audio for you, so keep your batteries charged!
- Ask open-ended questions, ones that cannot be answered by a yes or no.



- This is bad:
You: “Are you enjoying this meeting?”
Them: “Yes.”
- This is good:
You: “What do you enjoy about this meeting?”
Them: “I’m having a really good time! There are so many physicists from around the world who are presenting great research.”
- If possible, research the interviewee beforehand to prepare more thoughtful questions. This won’t apply in all cases.

Pictures!

Your article needs to have pictures. **We would like you to submit at least 3 photos with descriptive captions and photo credit details.**

Here’s how to take great pictures:

- Set your phone or camera to the highest quality setting
- Always use flash, even in daylight. Stay close to your subject if indoors. Don’t be afraid to (non-disruptively) get closer to the lectern if you’re photographing a speaker on stage.
- Upload the raw file--we’ll take care of processing and adjustments
- In some cases (touring sensitive sites, for example), photographs might not be allowed. In that case, try to get photos of your group getting on the bus or in front of (not inside) the tour location.
- Never send images downloaded from the web
- Don’t send any file less than 1MB in size
- Include thoughtful captions with your pictures. If you are submitting photos that someone else took, be sure to give them credit as well.
- Take action/interesting photos as well as group photos/headshots. Action shots that parallel your article can be eye-catching to the reader.

What to Submit and What Comes Next

When you submit your article, you need:

- The article with a title and “By [your names]”
- At least 3 pictures

Then what?

- Payment will come by check approximately 4 weeks after receipt of the article
- Chapter reporters: submit your institution’s tax ID on the application site for fund disbursement
- Individual reporters: submit your W-9 for fund disbursement



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Keep your notes!

- Keep EVERYTHING--notes, article drafts, interview recordings, etc--for one full year after you submit your draft. We will edit your story and may have follow-up questions for you, so you'll want to have your materials to refer to.

Reminder about deadlines

Please keep abreast of deadlines specified in your award notification. As well, be mindful of communication regarding deadlines from SPS National staff.