

This document is an approximation of the logistical course information that I discussed in our first discussion sections. I incorporated answers to some questions into this document.

Purpose of discussion sections

Supplement and enhance lectures. A chance for more personal interaction - I can answer questions more thoroughly; you have opportunity to ask more questions and to make suggestions. We will often use the discussion time to discuss labs and homework. Will use it to review for exams and to talk about exams after they are graded. Sometimes talk about recent astronomy news, do demonstrations not possible in lecture time. I will announce at the beginning of Wednesday lecture (and post on the "Lecture" link to our webpage) what the topic of each week's discussion section will be. Just like I won't force you to attend the lectures, I won't force you to attend discussion section. But you should always ask classmates what you miss if you don't attend.

Reading routine

Don't forget to do the Blackboard survey questions for *each reading - its 5% of your grade*. (I'm working on having the surveys show you the correct answers after you've finished.) The surveys are intended to test a basic understanding of the material. You are allowed to use your book to help you answer the questions. If you think they're too easy, keep in mind that only 80% of students are answering them correctly. If you think they are too hard, then you should consider setting up a study group with classmates or seeing me during office hours.

Homework routine

Almost always due on Fridays. Both homework and lab assignments are due *at the time of your lecture*. Handing in a homework late (without prior permission or a serious excuse) will result in 10% penalty per day. The assignment for the next week will typically be made available on Fridays, by midnight on Saturday at the latest. Solutions will typically be posted on the Monday following the due date. You will be able to find the solutions on the Work webpage where the assignment was originally posted. You are welcome to use a calculator for homework (and labs), but are also welcome to use reasonable back of the envelope calculations - as long as you are clear about your approximations. There are cases where a calculator, either handheld or online, will be necessary... but not many.

Lab routine

Labs will be assigned on a less regular and systematic basis, although they will roughly occur once every other week. Its essential to immediately be on top of any

observing component of labs (such as the Angles lab, the Moon phase lab I posted, and the upcoming Milky Way lab) because weather can be so difficult. Weeks that have a lab due, will typically have a lighter homework load.

Rules of thumb for assignments

Always try your assignments before coming to discussion section. Although I will try to help as much as I can, don't rely on me to answer questions you have about the homework during the 16+ hours before the assignment is due; Important to try the assignment early so you bring your questions to office hours or discussion sections. You are welcome to collaborate with classmates on the labs and homework - if you follow the guideline that you try everything on your own first and the work that you hand in is a faithful representation of your own work and understanding, not a copy of someone else's work. For now, you don't need to indicate who you collaborate with on your assignment. I hope that I don't need to change this policy.

You need to clearly show work in enough detail such that someone could read your homework and know what you were answering and how you answered it, without seeing the textbook. All variables you use should be explicitly defined. All numbers should have units attached. All final answers should be presented in context. Instead of "5 days" you would say "It would take 5 days for a Mazda to drive from the Earth to the Moon."

Be thoughtful and think critically about your answers. The goal is not to cough up the minimum answer that could conceivably answer the posed question. Assignments will be graded according to this expectation... a bit easier on the first assignments, but become increasingly strict about this.

If you calculate an answer that you know is wrong (for example, that the Earth is 1 million times large than the Sun), you will get partial credit if you right down that you know you are wrong, why you know that you are wrong, and where you may have gone wrong... even if you can't figure out exactly how to fix your mistakes. Again, the point is for you to develop your critical thinking and analysis and to demonstrate this development on assignments.

Labs on the docket

Angles lab - 3 parts; Part III requires naked eye observations. Be on the lookout for any clear night! I will be reasonable, and if only 1 single night is clear between when you are given a lab and when its due, I'll extend the due date (for the observational part of the lab). But if there are several clear nights, and the two

before the due date happen to be cloudy, then I will be more strict. A couple of the questions are a bit subtle on the lab, so don't rush through answering them.

Moon phase lab - We will make firsthand observations of the Moon's phases, and use it to develop a model with predictive power. The power of a model to make testable predictions is an essential part of the scientific process. Approximately every other day/night, you will observe the Moon phase, the height above the horizon, and record the time and date of observation in a table. Need to begin right away. Will hand in copies of these drawings the week after Fall break, along with answers to analysis questions. Will hand in your entire semester's worth of drawings and answers to analysis questions at the end of the course. Will see how obtaining more data affects the accuracy of your prediction and measured synodic period of the Moon.

Milky Way lab - Made available when Part III of Angles lab is handed in. May be on Sept 16th (its current due date), but if the weather continues...