

ASTRONOMY 4

Solar System Astronomy

De Anza College • Spring 2026

Term	Spring 2026 De Anza College
CRN	00191
Course	ASTR D004.50Z Solar System Astronomy
Format	Fully asynchronous online
Canvas	Sp26 ASTR D004 50Z Solar System Astronomy
Instructor	Srikar Srinath
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Textbook

Astronomy, 2nd Edition by OpenStax, written in part by Foothill's own Prof. Fraknoi, is available **free** online in multiple formats:

- [Read online \(Web View\)](#)
- Download as PDF — **recommended**, since you can annotate it in any PDF reader
- Download as ePUB for e-readers

Use whichever format works for you. The PDF is the most flexible for note-taking.

Lectures

Lecture videos are linked in Canvas modules and are meant to be watched on your own schedule. There are no live class sessions. Additional supplementary videos will also be linked each week.

Office Hours & Questions

I don't hold regular office hours, but I'm happy to meet with you over Zoom. Here's how:

- **Zoom by appointment:** Send me a Canvas message with 2–3 times that work for you. I'll send you a Zoom link for a mutually convenient time.
- **Canvas Inbox:** Best for most questions. I typically respond within 12–24 hours on weekdays. If you message on a Friday evening, expect a reply by Sunday evening. If you haven't heard from me within that window, send a follow-up because your message may have slipped down in my inbox.

About This Course

Astronomy 4 is an introductory course about the contents of our Solar System and what we have learned through nearly 70 years of space exploration and 400+ years of telescopic observation. No prerequisites. The class is designed for non-science majors, but we will be doing real science because anybody can.

De Anza College advises: ESL 5 or equivalent English proficiency.

Attendance & Engagement

Regular engagement with course content is required. If you do not submit any assignments in the **first two weeks** of class, you *will* be dropped.

Plan to spend around 5 hours per week on coursework (watching lectures, completing assignments, etc.). The course builds on earlier concepts week by week so keeping up is important.

Grades

Your grade is based entirely on assignments, and there are no midterm or final exams.

- **Weekly assignments (50%):** Each week, a recent article or video related to course topics will be posted. You'll answer short questions about it.
- **Biweekly labs (50%):** Every other week, a lab involving online tools or simulations will be posted.
- **Extra credit:** Starting in Week 8, you may select a Solar System-themed video from the [Silicon Valley Astronomy Lecture series](#) and write a short report. A strong extra credit submission can raise your grade by one full letter grade.

Late Policy

Assignments are due on the date posted. Late submissions are penalized 20% per day, up to a maximum of 5 days. After 5 days, the assignment will not be accepted and marked as a 0.

If something comes up, the extra credit assignment exists for exactly this reason.

Academic Integrity & AI Use

The Short Version

Don't cheat. Don't submit work that isn't yours.

Cheating on any assignment is grounds for a failing grade and a permanent note in your student file, with additional consequences at the discretion of the administration.

Generative AI: What's Allowed and What Isn't

AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini are genuinely useful for learning. They can re-explain confusing concepts, help you organize your thoughts, and clean up your writing. You're encouraged to use them. But there's a right way and a wrong way.

The key rule: Do the work first, then use AI to help you write it up and *always* disclose.

DO:

- Complete all required activities on your own first: labs, simulations, readings
- Use AI afterward to help organize your findings or improve your writing
- Use AI freely for studying: getting a second explanation, brainstorming, or simplifying material
- Disclose your AI use at the end of your submission (see below)

DON'T:

- Feed the assignment prompt to an AI and submit what it gives you
- Use AI to generate descriptions of labs or simulations you didn't actually do
- Invent or fabricate data, measurements, or tool outputs
- Add a one-liner like "I used AI to help" with no specifics. That's not disclosure, that's a fig leaf, and it still counts as cheating

What Counts as Cheating

Submitting AI-generated work without proper disclosure is cheating even if you add a disclaimer afterward. If your submission describes observations, data, or experiences from a lab or simulation you didn't actually do, that's academic dishonesty, regardless of whether AI or you wrote it.

Some assignments may use Turnitin and other tools as part of the review process.

How to Disclose AI Use

At the end of your assignment, add a brief note. It takes 30 seconds and there is no penalty.

Best option: share a link to your chat session:

Most AI tools let you generate a shareable link. If yours does, paste it in. That covers everything.

"I used Claude (claude.ai) to reorganize my paragraphs after completing the simulation. Chat link: [link]"

If your tool doesn't support chat links:

Provide the tool name and version, the prompt(s) you used, and a brief note on what you changed or kept.

"I used ChatGPT (GPT-4o) after finishing the crater simulation. My prompt was: 'Here are my notes. Help me write two paragraphs from them.' I kept the structure but rewrote most of the sentences."

Not acceptable:

"I used AI to help with this assignment."

That tells me nothing and does not count as disclosure.

The labs in this course are designed so that doing the activity is the learning. An AI doing it for you means you miss the point and the solar system is too interesting to outsource.

Course Schedule

Lecture content is tentative based on class progress. Assignments will only cover material presented up to the due date. **Dates are subject to change. Always check Canvas for the most current schedule.**

Week	Date	Chapters	Topic
Week 1	Apr 06	Ch 1	Cosmic Context
		Ch 2	Diurnal, Annual, and Planetary apparent motions
Week 2	Apr 13	Ch 3	Orbits: Kepler & Newton, The Seasons
		Ch 4	Moon phases, Tides, Eclipses
Week 3	Apr 20	Ch 5	Time & Light
		Ch 5	Spectra
Week 4	Apr 27	Ch 6	Telescopes on Earth and in Space: how they work
		Ch 7	Overview of the Solar System
Week 5	May 04	Ch 8	Earth as a planet
Week 6	May 11	Ch 8	Earth-shaping processes and Climate Change
Week 7	May 18	Ch 9	Cratered Worlds: The Moon and Mercury
		Ch 10.1–10.3	Venus
Week 8	May 25	Ch 10.4–10.6	Mars
		Ch 11	The Giant Planets
Week 9	Jun 01	Ch 12	Moons of the Giant Planets
		Ch 13, 14	Dwarf planets, asteroids, comets
Week 10	Jun 08	Ch 15	The Sun
		Ch 16	The Sun: stellar and Solar System formation
Week 11	Jun 15	Ch 21, 30	Planets around other stars, Life in the Galaxy
Week 12	Jun 27		<i>Extra credit assignments due</i>

Student Learning Outcome(s):

- Appraise the benefits to society of planetary research and exploration.
- Compare and contrast the development of planetary systems and of the major planet types, including those factors that have led to Earth's unique characteristics.
- Evaluate astronomical news items or theories concerning solar system astronomy based upon the scientific method.

Office Hours:

M 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Zoom,Canvas