

Mathematical Methods of Physics (PH 370) Course Syllabus

Fall 2026 • Northern Michigan University

Instructor	Dr. P.W. Mengyan (“men-gin”) Office: TSB 2513 Cohodas 402C Phone: 906.227.2183
Email	pmengyan@nmu.edu [preferred comm. method]. Begin subject line with “PH 370:”
Office Hours:	W,F 10 to 10:50 in Science 2513. <i>Other times and formats by appointment. These times may need to be adjusted during the week. Any changes temporary or otherwise will be communicated to students by email as needed.</i>
Class Meetings	PH 370 - Lecture [CRN: 82293; 3 credits]: {M,W,F} 09:00 to 09:50 in Science 2506
Webpage:	https://educat.nmu.edu ; http://physics.nmu.edu/~pmengyan
Reference Texts:	M.L. Boas. <u>Mathematical Methods in the Physical Sciences</u> . (3 rd ed).
<u>Not required</u>	K.F. Riley et al. <u>Mathematical Methods for Physics and Engineering</u> . (3 rd ed). S. Hassani. <u>Mathematical Physics: A Modern Introduction to its Foundations</u> . R.L. Herman. <u>A Course in Mathematical Methods for Physicists</u> .
Math resource	M.R. Spiegel, et al. <u>Schaum’s outlines: Mathematical handbook of formulas and tables</u> . [ISBN: 978-1260010534]. <i>Hardcopy of something similar is strongly recommended.</i>

Course Description (outline and expected outcomes):

This course will provide a junior to senior level an overview of a selection of important mathematical methods used by scientists and engineers with applications to physical systems. This course will further develop critical thinking and general problem-solving skills. A student who is successful in this course will be able to apply each technique (outlined below) to develop an appropriate solution (model) to describe the behavior of a real physical system. Progress towards these outcomes will be assessed through in-class exams and assignments that may include homework, quizzes and projects. More information is available via the webpage.

Grades

Homework, Quizzes, Attendance:	25%	A: $\geq 90\%$	A passing score for each component must be earned in order to qualify for a passing score in the course
In-semester Exam:	25%	B: $\geq 80\%$	
Final Exam:	25%	C: $\geq 70\%$	
Project [†] :	25%	D: $\geq 60\%$	
Total:	100%	F: $< 60\%$	

[†]In the event that the project is replaced with a smaller assignment or omitted for the semester by the instructor, the project-associated 25% will be distributed equally to the remaining 3 categories.

Homework

May be assigned periodically during lecture and may include suggested questions, readings and other activities to supplement the lecture. Due date, time and assignment description will be indicated on each assignment. Late assignments are *not* typically accepted.

The homework will take time and effort to understand and may be challenging. Start the homework as soon as it is available and allow plenty of time to work through each question. Be warned that some questions may go quickly and others may take a significant amount of time.

Quizzes

May be administered during the regularly scheduled class time and may include content from lecture, homework, exams or any other relevant sources. They may or may not be announced during class or via email. Make up quizzes will *not* be administered. These will be designed with a few goals in mind (1) provide students the opportunity to check their understanding of relevant material and receive feedback from the instructor (2) provide the instructor with feedback as to how well students are understanding the material (3) encourage students to continue to stay on top of the material, develop sound study habits, regularly attend class, etc

Exams

There will be a minimum of one (1) scheduled exams during the semester plus a cumulative final exam. Each in-class exam is equally weighted. Unless otherwise specified by the instructor, the in-semester exams will be administered in the normal classroom, during a normal class time and may include a take-home component.

The final exam will be administered in the same room as lecture and the time pre-determined by NMU. Make up exams will not be administered. If an exam is to be missed due to extenuating circumstances, contact me via email BEFORE the scheduled exam time to see about making the appropriate arrangements. Use of notes, books or electronic gizmos of any sort will not be permitted on the exams unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Project

Details relating to the project for this course will be confirmed during the semester but may include a formal scientific paper (*PRL*-style formatting with 4-page limit) and/or a 12+3 minute presentation. The projects will be based on concepts related to the course. The final project will be due around the last week of the course (deadline will be specified during the semester). Final papers, if assigned, are to be submitted no later than 17:00 the business day immediately preceding the first scheduled talk.

Additional details regarding formatting, content, style and other expectations will be discussed in class.

Other Requirements and Important Notes

- Attendance:

You are expected to be in every class and on time. Absences will be excused for officially sanctioned university events, illness (documentation *may* be required), court appearance (plaintiff, defendant, witness, juror – documentation is required), family emergencies (at the discretion of the instructor and may require appropriate documentation).

If something occurs that you feel should be grounds for being excused it is your responsibility to contact your instructor, in writing, PRIOR to the absence (if possible, or as soon as possible after the absence) to discuss the situation. Excused absences for situations beyond the purview of NMU policy are at the sole discretion of the instructor, will be evaluated confidentially, on a case-by-case basis and confirmed in writing.

An excused absence does not necessarily excuse you from completing the work. Arrangements for a planned excused absence, if possible, should be finalized (with written confirmation between student and instructor) no later than one business day before the planned absence, if possible.

Otherwise, establish contact with the instructor as soon as reasonably possible.

Attendance may be taken during any of our lecture meetings and may be done without warning.

- Submitted work:

Unless otherwise specified by the instructor, any work submitted for credit must be on standard letter size, clean, loose-leaf paper (i.e. not torn from a notebook, not covered in mysterious substances), clearly labeled and well organized. For homework, each question should be started on a fresh sheet of paper and writing should be on only one side per page.

- MATLAB:

is to be used for any data analysis and plotting needs, including homework unless specifically stated otherwise. If you use MATLAB to assist you in solving a question submitted for credit for anything more complicated than what could be otherwise easily done on a handheld calculator, a clean version of the m-file, command output and any relevant figures must be submitted with the assignment and attached to an email in a single .zip file to the instructor prior to the deadline.

Exceptions to this rule can be made in the event where Maple or other program is a more appropriate tool; but this requires instructor approval if it an assignment submitted for credit.

- **Late Assignments:**
Late work is not generally accepted. Should something arise that will prohibit you from submitting work on time, talk to your instructor as soon as you recognize there may be an issue.
- **ADA Statement:**
In compliance with the ADA and university policy, *"If you have a need for disability-related accommodations or services, please inform the Coordinators of Disability Services in the Dean of Students Office at 2001 C. B. Hedgcock Building (906-227-1737 or disability@nmu.edu). Reasonable and effective accommodations and services will be provided to students if requests are made in a timely manner, with appropriate documentation, in accordance with federal, state, and university guidelines"*
- **Religious Holidays:**
Pursuant to university policy, a student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known, in writing, to the instructor prior to an absence. A student who is absent from a class, exam or exercise for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to complete an assignment or exam scheduled for that day within a reasonable time around that absence.
- **Academic Integrity:**
Section 2.3.1 of the NMU Student Handbook discusses scholastic dishonesty; all of which will be upheld in all aspects of this course. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.
- **AI Statement/Policy:**
Unless otherwise specifically authorized by the instructor, the use of generative AI (e.g. Chat GPT, Gemini, etc) is not allowed. Students are not permitted to use AI to find answers for work that is being submitted for a grade. A student using AI to complete graded work is like having another person do the student's assignment and then putting their own name on it. For example, while working on a homework assignment, a student enters the question into an AI system that outputs a solution, and the student submits the output as their work. This is considered cheating and will be handled according to the student code of conduct.
There will be opportunities to discuss how AI may support a learning opportunity or as a tool, but that will be specifically guided by the instructor.
Amendments to this AI Statement/Policy for this class may be made during the semester and will be communicated during class or in writing to the students as appropriate.
- **Appropriate behavior:**
I expect students to behave in a respectful, considerate and courteous fashion in any activity related to this course (e.g. Lecture, lab, discussion, office hours etc).
Rude, disrespectful or disruptive behavior will *never* be tolerated.

Final Notes and Suggestions to Succeed

- **Course Assistance:** A plethora of options are available to support your success in this course (e.g. Lecture [Dr. Mengyan], discussion via class, office hours, email or special appointment), your textbook, the library, other text books and your classmates. Take advantage of the available resources. **DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK QUESTIONS AS THEY ARISE!**
- Preparation is the key!
 - Read your course materials before AND after we discuss it in class
 - Take good notes during lecture (reorganize and rewrite if necessary)
 - Study your notes
 - Take advantage of available resources (e.g. *actually* attend class, read the recommended resources)
 - If something is unclear during lecture or your own studying, **ASK ABOUT IT!**
- Homework and supplemental work:

- Start your homework assignments as early as possible
- Read the homework questions when they are available before the related material is presented in class; familiarity with the questions will help you associate the relevant concepts as they are introduced in lecture, lab and while you read the material
- Give yourself plenty of time to complete the assignments as you will likely need to think carefully about the questions, review the relevant sections of the text or your notes and then work towards a solution
- Use a dedicated notebook to *fully* work out homework and supplemental questions
- Studying for any exam should be an ongoing exercise. Structured reviews of material built into your schedule promotes better long-term retention and higher understanding of the material
- I cannot stress enough: ASK QUESTIONS WHEN YOU HAVE THEM!

Specific expected outcomes

A successful student in this course will

- Be able to create a mathematical equation or system of equations that applies to or describes physical phenomena or processes
- Be able to interpret the solutions (physical models) to equation or systems of equations that describe physical phenomena or processes
- Be able to assess and make appropriate approximations that allow for solutions to physical equations to be attained while understanding the limitations of the assumptions
- Be able to identify appropriate mathematical methods that may be used to solve a problem or develop a model
- Be able to utilize visualize physical models using computer software

Tentative outline of Course Topics

In this course, we may work in the following topical areas (not necessarily in this order)

- Computational techniques
- Infinite series and expansions
- Linear algebra
- Partial differentiation
- Vector spaces (finite- and infinite-dimensional) and analysis
- Transforms (e.g. Fourier, Laplace)
- Differential equations and techniques to solve
- Partial differential equations and techniques to solve
- Calculus of variations (e.g. Euler equation; Lagrange equations)
- Statistical methods and distributions (Binomial, Gaussian, Lorentzian, Poisson)
- Statistics and experimental measurements

Notable dates

24 Aug 2026	First official day of class
07 Sep 2026	Labor Day (no class)
01 Nov 2026	Daylight savings time ends ('fall' back)
21 Nov – 29 Nov 2026	Fall break (no class)
30 Nov 2026	Classes resume [last week of full class]
Mon 07 Dec 2026	Final exam (08:00 to 09:50 in usual meeting space)
Sat 12 Dec 2026	Commencement
15 Dec 2026	Grades due [released to students 17 Dec 2026]