

Current Topics in Ecology & Evolution

EEB 3894

WRITING RESPONSE PAPERS AND PREPARING FOR DISCUSSIONS

For each week you should prepare for the discussions by:

- 1) Reading the assigned paper which you can find at our website:
http://hydrodictyon.eeb.uconn.edu/eebedia/index.php/Current_Topics_in_Ecology_and_Evolution
- 2) Organizing your thoughts, ideas, concerns and questions
- 3) Writing a one-page response paper

What we want

The response papers are designed to help you gather your thoughts while the discussion is designed to get you to share them with your peers. You will be graded on thoughtfulness, interest and relevance as well as proper English writing.

GRADING

Response papers are 2 points each.

THE ART OF WRITING THE ONE-PAGE RESPONSE PAPER

There are a few really simple tricks for writing a good paper:

1) KEEP IT TO 1 PAGE

Don't go over. If you do, then go back and edit something out until it fits on one page. This is critical so your reader knows what to expect. It's disorienting to expect to be done at the end of the page and then there's another half a sentence or maybe three more paragraphs on the back. I will enforce a strict limit by not reading anything past the end of the first page.

2) KEEP IT SIMPLE

Since this is a one-page response, there's no room to veer off on tangents. You have the space to introduce one idea, develop it and then wrap it up. That's it. Pick your topic carefully. If there is no clear best idea, try combining two in a synergistic way. Then organize your ideas into a few paragraphs. Introduce your main idea in the first paragraph, follow that with the heart of your argument or insight and then relate it back to you broader theme or idea. Easy as 1-2-3.

3) EDIT

The last but most important step is to edit your work. This is probably the most important step. Papers that read well have a polished progression of thought which can only be achieved by going over the writing several times. Print out your first draft and read it after a few hours have gone by. Have a friend or your grandmother read it and give you feedback. Rewrite it to find the most expressive phrasing and restructure to deliver your thoughts in the most organized and efficient manner possible. Spelling, grammatical, and formatting errors distract your reader and give the feeling that you don't care about your work. Papers are to be typed, 12 pt font, spaced either 1.5 or double spaced and please don't use wacky colored fonts or sans serif typesets.

4) HAVE FUN!

Write about what interests you. Pick a subject you would talk to your friends about. Try reading it out loud as though your best friend is your audience. If they would be interested, then others will be too. Follow up your thought and ideas with an internet or literature search and bring what you find there to bear on your idea. The more interested you are in the subject, the better you will write...guaranteed.

THE ART OF DISCUSSION

After writing the response paper, you should be ready to enter a fruitful discussion.

1) SHARE YOUR IDEAS

Share your reasons, observations and feelings, data relevant articles or whatever. If you don't talk, we can't give you points. Do others seem to be responding the same way as you? For the same reasons?

2) ENGAGE OTHERS

Let other people know how you think and feel about their ideas. Tell people if you agree or don't and why. Picking up threads and especially making connections between ideas is what makes for interesting discourse.

3) RESPECT

Be courteous and respectful. Civilized conversation requires many different viewpoints to come together and be heard before a greater understanding can emerge. This requires that people feel comfortable voicing their ideas. This in turn requires an open and accepting environment. Play nice. Nasty comments or personal attacks will not be tolerated. Also, please turn off your phones.

4) HAVE FUN!

When was the last time you got credit for talking in class, going to lectures and creative writing in a science class?

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism and cheating are violations of the student conduct code, and may be punished by failure in the course or, in severe cases, dismissal from the University. For more information, see Section IV of the Student Conduct Code available at the web site of the Dean of Students.