

Guidelines for Leading Discussion

Leading a discussion is a valuable skill to have: perhaps there is a topic of special interest to you, and you want feedback on a piece of work in your field. In addition, emailing professors, researchers, and administrators that technically outrank you is an important skill to learn. If you are interested in graduate school, this is how you find a potential advisor, form collaborations, and get help from experts in your field. Here are a few guidelines and a sample letter for requesting a paper suggestion for the week you lead discussion, as well as for leading discussion:

- Email the speaker **two weeks** in advance. This gives them time to respond (professors are very busy!), and then time to send the paper to the rest of the class. Send the email from your **@uconn.edu** account: this is more professional!
- CC Jimmy (james.bernot@uconn.edu) and Nora (nora.mitchell@uconn.edu) on the email so we know that you have sent it. If the speaker does not respond within a week (which may likely be the case), contact Jimmy and Nora and we will help pick out a paper.
- Once a paper is selected, we will email it and post it as a pdf on the website. As always, read the paper thoroughly and take good notes. Take special notes with questions or topics for discussion: this could be going through a confusing figure, asking questions about ideas that were new or confusing, or any of the usual response paper topics.
- During class, we'd like you to start discussion by asking some of these questions. We will help you direct the conversation, but you are also partly in charge of where it goes!

Sample Email

To: speaker@institution.edu
CC: james.bernot@uconn.edu nora.mitchell@uconn.edu
Subject: Seminar at the University of Connecticut

Dear Dr. LAST NAME,

My name is YOUR NAME, and I am a student at the University Connecticut. We are excited to hear you speak at the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biologys seminar series on Thursday, MONTH DAYth. I am participating in a special undergraduate seminar, Current Topics in Ecology and Evolution, where we read a paper written by the invited speaker, discuss it amongst ourselves, and then have the unique opportunity to meet with you and attend the talk as well.

I am leading discussion during your visit, and was inquiring to see if you have a paper that you would recommend reading that might go along with you seminar titled TITLE OF SEMINAR. I am especially interested in SOMETHING TO DO WITH THEIR WORK, and am excited to learn more about this topic and discuss it with you.

Thank you,
YOUR NAME