Guidelines For Writing Posts and Comments

In the Ecology & Natural History class most of your writing assignments will be essays submitted to the class blog in the form of postings and comments to the postings of your classmates. There are a number of details that you <u>must</u> pay attention to in order to make this process work and to earn full credit for your work.

Grading of Essay Assignments.

There are three components to this process. You must complete all three to earn full credit.

1. **First Draft** of the essay. This should represent your complete answer to the essay questions written in as polished form as possible. You should treat this draft as if it was your final draft ready to submit for a grade. The only changes you should anticipate making to this first draft are in response to the comments made by your classmates. The first draft is worth 50% of total grade of the assignment.
2. **Comments**. In addition to writing your own essay, you will be expected to make comments on the first drafts of two of your classmates. These comments should be concise but constructive and address specific points that are outlined in the rubric below. Your teacher may assign the two students for whom you will be making your comments. These will change with each assignment. Your comments are worth 30% of the total grade of the assignment.
3. **Final Draft** of the essay. This will be your final product. It should reflect a response to the comments made by your classmates and teacher. The final draft is worth 20% of the total grade of the assignment. Do not post your final draft until after the deadline for the comments! Your final draft should reflect changes you make in response to the comments!

Grading Rubrics and Policies for the Essay Assignments

- <u>Identification of your work</u>. Your teacher will be handling a great deal of material from you and your class mates. Each student in this class will be producing a first draft, two comments, and a final draft for each assignment. In order to keep careful records of your work and grade them efficiently it is important that you follow these instructions. If you do not, your work will be returned to you for correction and it will be considered late. Any posts or comments you make to the class blog must include the following in this order:

    1. Your name. Use your first name and first initial of your last name (e.g. Jennifer A).
    2. The assignment. Identify the assignment number and the work (e. g. Assignment 1, first draft).

- <u>Late work policy</u>. Because the completion of these assignments depends on the prompt posting of your first draft and comments, it is imperative that you submit your work on time. The following policies apply when you fail to do so:

    1. First Draft: Work submitted late will be penalized one letter grade for each day it is late starting with the date it is due. Work not submitted by the start of class on the due date will be considered late.
    2. Comments: Comments that have not been posted by class time on the day they are due will receive a grade of zero. Late work will not be accepted.
    3. Final Draft: Same policy as the first draft.

- <u>Grading Your Essays</u>. As I grade your essays I will be looking for the following:

    1. Identification: Identify yourself correctly in the title bar of your posting.
    2. Mechanics: Take care to spell check your work, use correct grammar, and formatting.
    3. Opening Thesis. Open your essay with a concise but informative thesis statement.
    4. Address the Questions. Most of your essays will have very specific questions or points you will need to address completely.
    5. Supporting Examples. Support your points with specific and appropriate examples.
    6. Opinions. In some assignments you will be asked to formulate an opinion on a topic. Articulate a clear, thoughtful opinion and support your position with logical arguments and examples.
    7. Conclusion. Wrapped up your essay with a brief but inclusive concluding statement.

8. Citations. If the assignment requires the use of sources other than your texts or class discussion, you must use parenthetical citations in the body of your work and include a work cited page.
9. Plagiarism. Work that is in whole or part taken from outside sources without proper citation will receive a grade of zero. See the "*Plagiarism And How To Avoid It*" posting on our class blog for more details.

- Grading Your Comments. As I grade your comments I will be looking for the following:

  1. Identification: Identify yourself correctly in the bar of your comment.
  2. Brevity: Keep your comments as concise as possible while still making your points
  3. Respect: Be sure your comments are in keeping with the spirit of constructive and helpful criticism.
  4. Completeness. Usually there will be four points you should make in your comments.
     - Did the essay address all the questions posed in the assignment? A simple "yes" will do or simply state which question(s) still need to be addressed.
     - Did the author support each question with specific examples when possible? Again a simple "yes" or simply state where examples are missing.
     - Identify the one specific aspect of the essay that you think stands out as the most positive element of the writing. Be specific and briefly explain your choice.
     - Identify the one specific aspect of the essay that you think requires the author's attention for revision or change. Be specific and briefly explain your choice. "None" as a response to this point is not acceptable.

How to Post Your Assignments to the Blog

These are the steps you need to follow in order to successfully post your essays to our class blog. Pay attention to the settings to insure that your posting goes to the correct place and carries the proper identification.

1. Become a "junior author" of our class blog by following the instructions in the email you will receive inviting you to join the class blog. You only need to do this once at the beginning of the school year.
2. Go to www.typepad.com and log in with your user name and password.
3. Click on the "Begin New Post" link.
4. Before you begin entering the text of your essay, set up the following options in the right hand column of the screen.
   - Under "Categories" select the assignment number you are entering, e.g. assignment 1, or assignment 2, etc.
   - Under "Comments" select the open comments option. Do this only for the first draft. Select "none" for the final draft.
   - Under "Posting Status" select to Publish Now or Publish On and then select the date your posting will appear on the blog. If you leave this option as Draft, your work will be saved on TypePad but not posted to the blog. Saving your work as a Draft is useful if you need to continue working of your post before it is ready to publish on the blog.
   - If you want to receive emails letting you know that someone has commented on your posting, check off accept trackbacks otherwise leave this option as is.
5. Be sure you are on the tab "Rich Text" and not "HTML". If you are very confident that you can edit the html code of your posting , try it. Understand that one simple oversight in your code will ruin your posting! Use with caution.
6. In the title bar be sure that you identify yourself with your first name and last initial and include the assignment number, e.g. Jennifer A. Assignment 1, first draft.
7. Enter the text of your essay. You are encouraged to use the formatting and spell checking features to enhance your post. If you prefer, you can compose your essay in a word processing program and then copy and paste to the blog.
8. If you do use a word processing program, be sure you use a simple format such as "Rich Text Format" or simple "Text." More sophisticated formats such as Microsoft Word document (.doc) may not be compatible with the blog editor.
9. You are encouraged to include add pictures and other graphics to complement your posting. Be sure that you include proper citations indicating the source of these graphics. We will cover this technique in class.
10. Once you are satisfied that your options have been set correctly and your essay and title are in good order, click on "Save." Go to the *Ecology & Natural History* class blog link on Mr. Birch's Class Pages to view your work.