

***Writing assignment #2:
Conducting research on some aspect of an organism of your choice***

Assigned Monday, November 15th

Due Monday, November 29th (in class)

This assignment will write allow you to develop and/or practice various skills, including:

- picking a good research topic
- conducting library research, and
- writing an interesting, cogent, and concise paper based on that research.

The product of this research will be a 3 – 5 page paper that uses at least three sources from the primary literature, and effectively answers some question that you have posed.

The assignment

Research some aspect of the ecology or evolution of an extant organism (species) that is of interest to you, and about which you have at least one significant question. You may approach this by considering what topics are interesting to you—for instance, Nitrogen fixation, intraspecific competition, or defenses that plants use against herbivores. You should be able to pose your topic as a question, such as: How do organisms adapt to extreme habitats? Once you have a question, you may focus on a particular organism that you want to research. Alternately, you may start with an organism that fascinates, and from there consider what questions about the ecology or evolution of that organism would interest you sufficiently to conduct research on it.

Your research must include at least three sources from the primary literature. If you can find one, a review paper will be helpful as well. We will discuss what these terms mean in class on Thursday. You may use other sources as well—such as web-based sources—but do not rely primarily on these.

Pitfalls that you may encounter in conducting this research include:

- You don't know what you're interested in.
- You've picked a topic that is too large for the scope of this project.
- You've picked a topic about which nothing seems to be known.
- You've waited until the last minute, and now can't access any primary literature.

The workshop in class on Thursday will help you avoid the first three pitfalls above. There is no cure for the last one besides starting your work early, but know that it's a real problem. Many of your best resources will not be available as soon as you want them, unless you're up at the University of Washington libraries.

Come to class on Thursday (Nov 18) with your organism picked out, and a list of three potential questions that will focus your paper.

Citing the work of others in the text of your paper

You should use the style guidelines from the American Psychological Association (APA) when citing outside references in your paper. A complete explanation of these can be found at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html.

If you are referring to an idea from another work but **NOT** directly quoting the material, cite just the author and year of publication in your in-text reference. E.g.:

The common name for *Mus stentorius*, the 'deafening house mouse,' is a testament to this small mouse's enormous vocal range, and willingness to sing at a moment's notice (Spatchflock & Donatario, 1987).

If you are directly quoting from a work or referring to a specific idea from a book (as opposed to the entire book), include the author, year of publication, and page #. E.g.:

As the famed early-20th century American naturalist, Boris Donatario, recalls "The vocalizations of these mice were so unique, I could recognize individuals by the timbre of their voice, and by what they were saying" (Donatario, 1907, p. 107).

If you are citing a work that has no author, no date, and no page numbers (for example many web pages do not list authors), use the first few words from the title, then the abbreviation n.d. (for "no date"). E.g.:

More recent work suggests that *M. stentorius* is communicating via subterranean vibrations as well ("Fabulous and erroneous natural history facts" n.d.).

When citing works in the text of your paper that have more than two authors, use only the name of the first author, followed by the Latin phrase *et al* (in italics), and the date of the work. "Et al" literally means "and others.". E.g.:

In the largest study yet published on *M. stentorius*, the researchers demonstrated that this species does not know its own strength (Butterworth *et al*, 1997).

References Cited: the list at the end of the paper

In a section titled "References Cited" at the end of your paper, include only those references that you actually made mention of in your paper. Format as follows:

- Authors' names are inverted (last name first). Include names of all authors. Alphabetize the list by authors' last name.
- When an author appears both as a sole author and, in another citation, as the first author of a group, list the single-author entries first. If no author is given for a particular source, alphabetize using the title of the work.
- All lines after the first line of each entry in your reference list should be indented one-half inch from the left margin. This is called hanging indentation.

Examples (for more, see the website cited at the bottom of page 1):

- **An article in a journal**

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (Year). Title of article. *Title of periodical*, volume number, (issue number), pages.

E.g.: Butterworth, L., Spatchflock IV, J. R., & Prolific, I. M. (1997). The call of *Mus stentorius* starts avalanches on Mt. Rainier. *American Naturalist* 35, (2), 550-562.

- **Part of a nonperiodical (e.g., a book chapter or an article in a collection)**

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year of publication). Title of chapter. In A. Editor & B. Editor (Eds.), *Title of book* (pages of chapter). Location: Publisher.

- **Nonperiodical Internet Document (e.g., a Web page or report)**

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). *Title of article*. Retrieved month date, year, from <http://Web address>.

A few other notes:

Use page numbers. Include a good title. Spell-check. Proofread.