

Discussion Sections: Instructions to Leaders and Participants

The discussion sections are worth 10% of your final grade. I view it as an essential component of this course because this is where you will learn to communicate and debate scientific concepts and current topics in biology. I have chosen several topics that have received a lot of media attention over the last months or years. If you are interested in other topics not included in the schedule, we can incorporate those as well. Each week I will assign one article (either a news article or a scientific review of the topic) for everyone to read prior to discussion.

Discussion Participants

The entire class is responsible for (1) carefully reading the assigned article, (2) taking a reading quiz (about 5 questions) before discussion begins, and (3) being prepared to actively *discuss* the topic (ask questions about terms or concepts you do not understand, make comments on points with which you agree or disagree, debate the possible impact on society and the environment, or bring in other articles that you have read that are relevant to the topic and tell the class about them). Your quiz grades and participation count for 5% of your final grade.

Discussion Leaders

Every student in the class must sign-up to serve as a discussion leader at least once. This will count for 5% of your final grade. The responsibilities of the discussion leaders include:

- (1) Read the assigned article carefully and do research to find 2-4 additional articles on the topic. The additional articles must come from reputable news sources and/or scientific magazines or institutions, such as *The New York Times*, *Scientific American*, *Discover*, *National Geographic*, *Science*, *Nature*, the National Institutes of Health or the Center for Disease Control. The references used in preparing the presentation must be submitted on the day of discussion.
- (2) Together, the discussion leaders will prepare a short oral presentation (10-15 minutes) on the discussion topic, using visual aids such as slides, videos, or hand-outs. The presentations will be scored on the following items:
 - A. Introduce the topic: Provide enough scientific background so that the key terms and concepts are clear (visual aids may be particularly useful in this regard). Be sure to define the scientific terms used in the assigned article and relate them to the material we have covered in class. The discussion topics have been arranged in a specific order to correlate with the lecture material.
 - B. Identify the main questions, problems, or issues related to the given topic (highlighting those in the assigned article). Why is this topic so controversial? Address the possible outcomes and solutions to the above identified problem(s) or question(s). What is likely to be the next big story?
 - C. How does this problem or issue impact society and/or the environment? State your own opinions, if any, on the assigned article and the topic in general. Use this opportunity to initiate discussion and debate among the participants. You may want to think of some questions or activities to involve the class (such as making two 'teams' and having an official debate, etc.)