

Independent Research Paper Instructions

This exercise is designed to familiarize students with the scientific resources that are available to the public and to help develop your critical thinking and scientific writing skills. Although this is an ‘independent’ research paper, I would encourage you to discuss your ideas with your classmates, to share resources, and to read and edit each other’s papers. If you have trouble finding an interesting topic or reliable resources, I am happy to help.

This assignment will take the place of a cumulative final. Prepare a 5-8 page research paper (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) on the topic of your choice. Specifically, the paper should be 5-8 pages *text* plus an abstract (short summary (<200 words) of the paper at the beginning) and a bibliography (list of sources that you reference in the text of the paper). You may also include figures, although this is not required. Below I have listed formats for you to choose from which will hopefully make this a more interesting and fun assignment than a normal ‘research paper’:

Option A:

You are a well-known science writer for *The New York Times*. Your editor has asked you to write a feature article on your favorite ‘hot topic’ in modern biology. Your performance on this assignment could lead to a BIG promotion (and then maybe you’ll be able to buy that cottage in the Hamptons you’ve had your eye on...*or maybe*, pay off your credit card balance)! Your editor said that the article should be in-depth, citing the primary scientific research papers directly related to the topic and suggested that you could even interview a local scientist to get his/her opinion on the topic. The bottom-line, though, is that this article has to explain the scientific language on a basic level so that your readers can understand the technology and terminology, and its potential impact on society and the environment.

Option B:

Your double degree in communications and biology has really been put to good use in your job as a writer in the Public Relations Department at the National Park Service headquarters in Washington, D.C. Since you are a native of the Pacific Northwest, your boss has given you a special travel assignment. The park brochures for the National Parks in Washington state, it turns out, are seriously out-of-date. Your assignment is to design and write a new brochure on your favorite National Park in Washington. Of course, you’ll have to talk to some park rangers to get the inside scoop on the park. In the brochure, you’ll give a little bit of history on the park, highlight the different ecosystems and biodiversity in the park, and discuss modern threats to these ecosystems.

Option C:

Write to your local congressperson(s) to argue for/against legislative action on a biological/medical issue about which you feel very strongly. State the problem or issue and why it is important. Explain the scientific and technical terminology (because there are very few trained scientists or medical professionals in Congress, you can assume they do not know a lot about the ‘science’ of the topic). Propose what action you feel Congress should take on this issue (be persuasive) and, if appropriate, how that action might be funded. Be sure to discuss how this problem or issue impacts society, the environment, and/or the economy.

Option D:

Come up with your own format and let me know what you want to do. I'm open to other ideas.

This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade. There are several deadlines for this assignment throughout the quarter, listed below. Any late submissions will be noted and 5% will be deducted from your final paper grade. The research paper rough draft is optional and for your benefit. If you submit a rough draft, I will read your paper, make comments and corrections, and return it to you for revision. March 4-11 is the week that I will accept drafts of your research papers. Rough drafts will not be accepted after this period. The final draft of your research paper is due 3/24 at 8:00 a.m. (the time scheduled for your final exam).

Due Dates:

Jan. 26	Topic due
Feb. 10	Outline due
Feb. 26	Abstract and Bibliography due
Mar. 4-11	Rough Draft due (optional)
Mar. 24	Final Paper due