

The basic facts:

1. We are all busy and have multiple responsibilities and commitments in our lives outside of this class (other classes, jobs, families, etc.) and this poses a big challenge for all of us.
2. ‘Introductory Biology’ is a VERY broad topic, including all fields of biology (genetics, cell and molecular biology, biochemistry, ecology and evolution, botany and zoology, taxonomy, anatomy and physiology, developmental biology, immunology, and so on) and this poses a big challenge for all of us.
3. ‘Biology’ is part of our everyday lives--it in the medicine we take for our headaches, the observations we make on a nature hike, and the decisions we make at the grocery store. So, it is in our best interest as a society to have a basic understanding of biological terms and concepts.
4. This is a hard class and it is a lot of work. What you learn (and by extension, the grade that you earn) in this class directly correlates with the amount of effort that you put into it.

My teaching philosophy:

I believe that education is about learning how to think, learning how to use your resources and to apply your knowledge. It is not just about memorizing a bunch of facts that you will later forget. I have taken many biology classes and done a lot of experimental science, but that doesn't mean that I'm an expert in every field of biology. My job as your instructor is help you learn what resources are available to you and to help you acquire and develop the tools you need to learn the material and apply it—tools such as vocabulary, fundamental concepts, and critical thinking skills. I don't expect all of you to go on to become Ph.D. scientists at a big pharmaceutical company. My role as a science educator is to do what I can to make sure that the future doctors and nurses, pharmacists and physical therapists who come through my classroom understand the hows and the whys, not just the whats. As a patient, I want to be able to walk into a hospital and be treated by a nurse and a doctor who know not only WHAT medicine or treatment they are giving me, but HOW it works and WHY it is the best treatment option for me and my condition. My role as a science educator is to make it possible for you, the students, to read an article in the “Health and Medicine” or “Science” section of the newspaper and not only understand it, but be able to form an educated opinion about it and discuss it with your family, friends, and neighbors.

I believe in active teaching and active learning. I don't like classes that are all lecture, all the time. Learning should be interactive—that's why we have labs in which you work with a partner and you gain some ‘hands-on’ experience, that's why I've incorporated different activities and discussions into the curriculum, and that's why I encourage you to ask questions and make comments during class.

Our society has a particular format for evaluating the performance of students in a class—the grading system. While I understand why such a system is necessary, I think that there is an unrealistic pressure on students to always get an “A,” because everybody assumes that an “A” means that you're smart and it will help you get to the next step toward your goal. The inherent flaw in this system is that every course is different, every instructor is different, and every student is different. So, one student's A in my class will have a different value than another student's A in a different class. (This is the reason why, for example, we have standardized tests such as the SAT and the GRE...because you cannot compare the grades of students from all different schools and classes). Getting an education is not just about the product, it is about the *process*. Many of you are taking this class because it is required for you to get to the next step and not necessarily because of your love of biology, which I completely understand. But my hope is that you will approach the class with an open mind and enjoy the *process* of getting to the next step, not just ‘get through it’ so you can say that you filled the requirements for getting into a nursing program or whatever your goal may be. I am an idealist and I believe that every student, no matter what his/her background is, should be able to get an A in my class. I do have high expectations, though—not that you should be able to answer every exam question correctly, but that you will each make a sincere and honest effort to learn.

Grading System: Subjective Components

As stated on your course syllabus, each component of the class is worth a certain fraction of your grade. The lab counts for 25% of your final grade, the exams count for 45%, the research paper counts for 15%, the discussion counts for 10%, and field trips and other activities make up 5%. This will be the basis for your final grade; however, there are several subjective components that may boost your grade in the end if I feel that your grade does not reflect your ability:

Attitude: The attitude with which you approach the class is extremely important. If you have an open mind, self-confidence, a willingness to learn, and an appreciation for the process—you will get a lot more out of this class. If you assume that the material is too technical or too hard for you to really learn it, or if you complain about the assignments, you are not helping yourself or your grade.

Effort: I expect you to come to class *and* pay attention (I know it's early, but we have to try!) and/or read the chapters in the textbook as we go through the material in class. For every hour of class time, you should be spending *at least* an hour outside of class going over the material on your own. You paid for the class, so you should get your money's worth. But that means serious effort on *your* part as well as *mine*. Extra effort can be demonstrated by participating in class, asking questions (after class, by email, or during my office hours), forming study groups, getting a tutor, doing extra reading, and/or using the course and textbook websites.

Improvement: I know that the time up to the first exam is an adjustment period for every course you take. And I know that sometimes, you just have too many things going on and maybe you don't have as much time to study as you would like. So, if you show significant improvement over the quarter, this will definitely be factored into your grade. If you didn't do that well on the first exam, your chances of getting a good grade for the course are not ruined!

Study tips:

Figure out what learning style works best for you. Everybody has a different approach to learning. If you learn things best by reading, then make sure you carefully read all of the chapters in the book. If you are a visual learner, go through the lecture notes and use the activities on the textbook website. If you are an auditory learner, come to class and view the video/animation clips on the textbook website. If you learn things better by writing them down, take a lot of notes during class, make flashcards and draw schematics. You may have to try a few different things to figure out what helps you the most.

Form study groups. You have lab partners and discussion partners—ask them if they would like to study with you. It often helps to talk things through with someone, especially when it comes to complex biological processes (like meiosis). If you need help finding a study partner, just let me know.

Use your resources. I cannot emphasize this enough. You have a really good textbook with wonderful images and diagrams, in both the print version and the web version. The activities on the website are really good exercises for testing your knowledge and understanding of the material. As your instructor, it is my job to help you figure things out. Take advantage of my office hours or make an appointment to meet with me outside of class/office hours!

Official Changes in the Course Curriculum/Schedule:

Optional Final. I will give an optional final exam at the end of the quarter in our designated time slot for a final (Mar. 24). If you feel that you did not perform as well as you could have on an exam, you have the option of taking the final exam and I will drop your lowest exam grade. The only condition I have is that you take EVERY exam. You cannot skip an exam and then take the final and use that as your third exam grade.

Study guides. For future exams, I will distribute a study guide that highlights the main ideas in the unit we have covered. It will not be a comprehensive list of terms or definitions...it will be a *guide* to help you focus your time on the important concepts. (It will basically be a written version of the verbal tips/instructions I gave you for the last exam).