

Writing Assignment #4

Proposal Due: Tuesday April 16
Due Date: Tuesday April 23
Peer Reviews: Thursday April 25
Final Draft Due: Thursday May 2

We have covered many interesting and controversial subjects in lecture and section this semester, only a few of which we've written about. For the final paper, choose a topic you find particularly fascinating and write a 5-6 page, well organized and thoroughly presented essay. Choose a topic of the proper breadth: something too ambitious will leave a six page essay seeming shallow and underdeveloped, while a topic that is too narrow will necessitate the use of "filler."

Some general areas you might consider are: evolutionary constraint versus adaptationism applications of evolution (agriculture, medicine and/or conservation) sexual selection (e.g. good genes versus non-adaptive schools) species interactions and coevolution (today's lecture) conflicting levels of selection

You can also look ahead to topics we haven't covered yet, or research an area you wanted to learn about in this course that hasn't been addressed.

The benefits of choosing your own topic are that you get to work on something you're particularly interested in, and you don't have to fit your work into my preconceived ideas about how to address particular questions I asked. The drawbacks are that it is more work, and that you will have to be very clear and well organized for me to follow what you're saying without the crib of an assignment to guide both of us.

Organization is critical. Plan what you are going to say/argue before you write. Try making a rough outline. While I think these tactics will help you write a better paper, in my own experience writing on open topics, my epiphanies come as I near the end of my first or second draft. Men I must incorporate my ideas into the paper, which typically means rewriting the entire thing.

Using the process of writing to jumpstart your thinking like this can lead to great ideas and a great paper. But don't let ideas you have go to waste by being stuck in the last paragraph poorly supported. Make sure you have a well organized introductory paragraph with a clear statement of your thesis/argument. Don't keep me (or yourself) guessing until the end! Be sure to explain why this is an interesting and important topic in evolutionary biology.

Use the lectures, our discussions, and the reading as the basis for your paper. I also encourage you to do further research on your topic to gain a deeper understanding. I can probably help you find the key papers, or we can ask Sara to point us in the right direction.

A general note on revisions: I am happy to read a draft of your paper either before or after your peer review, but this time around, I'd rather not read the same draft that you get peer reviewed. I want you to make good use of the peer review, and of the time you've spent away from your paper, which should give you perspective on your paper. Try going

through paragraph by paragraph and making an outline after the paper is written. Does it make sense to you? Are you convinced? If not, reorganize it.

Proposal: I would like you to turn in an initial proposal of what you're going to write about no later than next Tuesday. You're welcome to discuss potential topics with me before then if you want to get started. Keep your proposal short and to the point -- less than a page typed. A beautifully executed essay on the foraging strategies of *Biston betularia* is not appropriate for this class and will earn you a poor grade. I will have no mercy. Also, there may be important literature I can point out on your subject.