

## **Instructions for term paper**

### **Content**

- Organize your paper into sections with headings. For a research paper these are typically along the lines of:
  - Abstract
  - Introduction/Background
  - Nature of the problem
  - Method
  - Results
  - Conclusion or Summary
  - Acknowledgements
  - References
  - (Figures – if not embedded in text)
- Make sure it is obvious to the reader from the start, what you are writing about and why. He/she should not have to read halfway through the manuscript to figure out why you are counting shrubs in transects across the Mohave Desert. Make sure it is really clear up front what you are studying, why, and how. This information should be in the introduction section.
- Also in the introduction and/or Background section should be a description of what other researchers have done and, in the case of a paper describing your own research, how that pertains to your work. In some contexts this section might be called a “literature review”, however, as a scientific paper this section does not contain literal quotes and references studies which directly relate to the work carried out here. The relevance of the prior work must be made clear.
- Make sure that when you turn in your paper, you have read through it in its final form. This may prove difficult to do after the many editing sessions that you have already enjoyed with it! Make sure you leave some time between each editing session otherwise you will have a tendency to skip over the same errors time and again. It is often very helpful to have a friend read it through as well as this lends a fresh perspective.

### **Format**

- Please use 1.5x (or double) spacing for all your text. That way it is much easier for the instructor to annotate your work.
- Use 1” margins all round. Use 12 pt font. Number your pages.
- Expensive binding and finishing is unnecessary and will not earn you extra points, but the final copy should be clean and neat.

### **Style**

- Try to write in the third person whenever possible. For the most part you will be presenting facts and I will not be interested in hearing your personal opinion – the use of “I” should be avoided.
- Avoid clichés. (“the bottom line”, “at the end of the day” etc.)

- Do not use direct quotations in your text unless absolutely necessary. In general it is better to paraphrase or explain the ideas in your own words and simply refer to the original work.
- If you use equations in your paper, make sure that every symbol in the equation is explained. Number equations sequentially for easy referencing.

### **Grammar and spelling**

- Don't rely on the spelling checker to find all your spelling errors. You must also read through your document to check that "their", "there" and "they're", for example, are correctly used.
- Read and re-read your manuscript. Edit it more than once or twice. Avoid the repetitious use of the same word in a sentence or a paragraph. Edit away all redundancies. I do not want to read the same information over and over again, simply expressed in a slightly different way each time. Remove unnecessary words. Be clear and succinct. DO NOT WAFFLE – I will not be impressed by length.

### **References**

- Cite articles by author(s) and year within your text. If there is a single author, the last name and year will suffice – e.g. (Hutchinson, 1995). If there are two authors, include both names and the year of the publication – e.g. (Hutchinson and Osborne, 1978). For more than two authors, use the first author with et al. – e.g. (Hutchinson et al., 1984).
- Include the list of references at the end of your paper. Do not include references you have read but not cited. List the references alphabetically by the first author's last name. The style of AGU (American Geophysical Union) is preferred ([reference style AGU.pdf](#))

### **Figures**

- Number figures consecutively and give each a caption. Refer to them in your text by their number. Figures can be embedded in the text but if you find it too frustrating to coax them into the right place in *Word*, feel free to place them all together at the end of your document.
- Make sure that you include all the information necessary to interpret your figures. In the case of graphs this would include the axes and units used, a legend for multiple lines or points displayed in different colors or patterns. For maps this would include a scale and North arrow. If figures are taken from other works, make sure you cite their original source.