

Conservation Biology

Spring 2007, Dr Julie Reynolds

Visible Thinking Journal

Consider your Visible Thinking Journal entries to be to be your initial thoughts in a conversation you would like to have on a topic that interests you.

What is the purpose of a *Visible Thinking Journal*?

In his book *Students Must Write* (©1996, Routledge publishers), Professor Robert Barrass suggests that there are four primary reasons to write:

- Writing helps you remember
- Writing helps you observe
- Writing helps you think
- Writing helps you communicate

Keeping a *Visible Thinking Journal* addresses all four of these reasons, with the emphasis on the first three. Your primary goal in keeping this journal should be to capture your ideas and thoughts about the topics we discuss in class, read about in books and articles, or experience in our field work and service at the Eno River State Park. You should strive to do much more than simply jot down your thoughts, however. You should engage in at least one of the following intellectual activities for each journal entry:

- Explore disparities between what you think/believe and what you read
- Make connections between your reading, class discussions, field work, and service
- Build upon the ideas of others
- Relate ideas in one text to another (where “text” can refer to assigned reading, your classmates’ writing, or something you read or heard outside of class)

One final purpose of this journal is to serve as a source of inspiration and ideas as you work on the more formal writing of this course.

Who is my audience?

Your audience is your classmates – they will be the primary readers of your work and they will be the only ones responding to your writing. As such, your writing can be informal, but I encourage you to be courteous by making your writing easy to read (i.e., disorganized writing is very challenging to read, as is writing that lacks punctuation and capitalization). Keep your readers in mind when you are writing, and consider your journal entries to be your initial thoughts in a conversation you would like to have on a topic that interests you.

What should I write in my journal?

Your choice of topics is fairly wide open, as long as it relates to the general topic of conservation biology. If you are stumped and have no idea what to write about, here are some places where you can find provocative questions to think about and respond to:

- Discussion questions at the end of the chapters in our Conservation Biology textbook
- Discussion questions posed in our Course Schedule
- Questions that arise as part of class discussion

Where should I post my journal entries?

You will post your journal entries to the Discussion Board in the forum called “Visible Thinking Journal.” There, each student will create a thread with their name in the subject line (i.e., “Julie Reynolds’ VTJ”). All your entries will be posted to this thread.

What else should I know about the VTJ?

Journal entries must be written in MS Word, and saved with the filename "*VTJ,yourlastname.date.doc*." Upload all your entries to your VTJ thread. Please calculate the word count for your journal entries, and include that word count at the bottom of each file. For full credit, 90% of your entries must be at least 500 words long (since it usually takes that long to really start to engage with the topic).

What should I write for my “Peer Response”?

Each week, you will read and respond to one VTJ entry written by a peer. Writing a Peer Response is fairly straightforward. First, go to the thread of the peer whose paper you are supposed to review and read their journal entry. Then, write a response to that person in the form of a letter. Your response should include at least one of the following intellectual activities:

- Ask your peer to clarify/expand upon a point that was raised, and explain why that point interests you
- Explore disparities between what your peer wrote and what you think/believe (being careful to respect your peer’s beliefs in the process)
- Make connections between your peer’s writing and readings, class discussion, field work, and/or service
- Build upon your peer’s ideas
- Acknowledge how your peer’s writing provoked new thoughts/insights/emotions in you

The goal is for you to sustain a written conversation about the course material, and for you each to add your own views and perspectives to the topic. Save your response as a MS Word document (with filename "*VTJ,peer'slastname.date.yourlastname.doc*") and post it to your peer’s thread. For full credit, 90% of your responses must be at least 500 words long – please be sure to include a word count at the end of your letter.

What are the due dates?

Your journal entries must be uploaded to Visible Thinking Journal Forum at least 24 hours before Wednesday’s class each week. To post a new journal entry, simply reply to your main thread: the

subject line should indicate the date of the entry. Peer Responses are due at least one hour before the beginning of Wednesday's class. Post your response to the Discussion Board by replying to the message where the VTJ entry was uploaded.

How will my VTJ be evaluated?

As noted in the syllabus, your VTJ (including your Peer Responses) accounts for 30% of your final grade for the semester. I will be reading your journals throughout the semester, but I will not be responding to them for the sole reason that I am not the primary audience for this writing. Nevertheless, given my responsibility for evaluating the overall quality of your work, here are my assessment criteria*:

1. If you produce a sufficient quantity of prose on a weekly basis (i.e., you produce entries and responses every week, and at least 90% of your entries and responses are at least 500 words long) and in the manner requested (on time, and uploaded appropriately in the Discussion Board), it will be hard for you to receive below a B-.
2. If, in addition to #1, you engage, you struggle, you open up, and you deal with the difficult, it will be hard for you to get below a B.
3. If, in addition to #1 and #2, you demonstrate significant improvement from the beginning to the end of the semester, it will be hard for you to get below a B+.
4. If, in addition to all the above, you demonstrate intellectual imagination, it will be hard for you to receive below an A-.
5. If you want an A, do all the above in the extreme.

* These criteria are adapted from criteria used by Duke Professor George Gopin, published in 2005 in the *Writing Across the Curriculum Journal*, Volume 16, pages 22-48.