

Course: Introduction to Physical Geology

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Term Paper and Oral Presentation: Due: Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Term Paper (100 points): A term paper will be due near the end of the semester; this paper will be at least 5 pages in length (double-spaced, not including illustrations) with a minimum of 5 references (three of which can be internet references). You will choose a topic related to geology, the earth, its materials or processes; you can get ideas from topics in the textbook or from the class schedule. The paper will be graded on the quality and quantity of geological information that is presented, not on your writing style or grammar.

The most effective papers are those that are related to something in your personal experience – somewhere you have traveled, an experience you had, or some especially interesting information you have to share. After about 2 weeks in the classroom you will select a topic and provide us with your choice. The paper should be typed and look professional.

Oral Presentation (200 points): In addition, you will present this paper orally in class as a 3-5 minute speech and then turn the paper in for a grade. Do not repeat information that we have discussed in class. It is more interesting for your classmates if you present new material. If you read the paper, points will be subtracted from your grade. You may use power point presentations, overheads, other media (video), diagrams on the white board, photos, or simply talk about your subject.

Suggestions:

Use knowledge and experience gained in your English writing classes to help you write your term paper. An excellent resource is the book “A Writer’s Reference” by Diana Hacker, published by Bedford/St. Martin’s, New York (www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/writersref). Use the best grammar possible, including complete sentences and correct punctuation and spelling, even though this will not detract from your grade.

Citation Style: In this geology class, there are no specifications for style of citation of references (MLA or Chicago-style or APA – American Psychological Association). In geology articles, we put the authors’ names and date in parentheses after the information we are citing; (Rasmussen and Keith, 2003) is an example, then the full citation is given in the Bibliography or List of References at the end of the paper. In geology, the citation is in this order: authors names (last name first), year, title of article: city, publisher, pages or journal name, volume, number, and pages. Use whichever style you are most comfortable with or whichever style is commonly used in your profession.

Topic: The most important choice you will make is your topic. It is best to choose one that you have a personal experience with or one with special interest for you. The enthusiasm that you bring to the topic because of your interest or experience will be communicated to your audience (teacher and fellow students) and will make a much more effective presentation. It is also important to narrow your topic to a small part of a big topic; write about a particular aspect of the Mt. St. Helens eruption, rather than writing about all volcanoes in general. General travelogues about your trip to a national park are

interesting, but you must have explanations of the geology (rocks, processes) of the park to make it a suitable topic. The most important part of the term paper is to have quality geological information, preferably something intriguing that is not covered in detail in the text book.

Resources: The internet is an easy way to get ideas and information for your paper. The Cochise College web pages created by Dr. Roger Weller at the Sierra Vista campus have an immense number of links: <http://math.cochise.edu/geol> . In addition, my website <http://www.janrasmussen.com> has numerous links in the lecture portion of each topic accessed through the schedule; these web pages have been supplied by students, but have not been checked for current connections. Another excellent source of links is the web pages created by Doug Shakel at Pima Community College in Tucson: www.azstarnet.com/~dshakel/ . The U.S. Geological Survey and Arizona Geological Survey also have numerous web pages that are full of accurate and interesting information.

Three of your five references need to be from a published book or magazine; these can be found in the public library or the Cochise College library. I also have numerous books on geological topics that you are welcome to borrow.

Organization: After reading the material you have researched and before you begin to write, decide on a one-sentence statement of your central idea. Then create a rough outline of your key ideas; these can be short headings to make the organization of your paper clear. Use topic sentences in each paragraph; this will make it easier to write the paper and easier for the reader.

The easiest way to write the paper is to use the technique of ‘clustering’. This is a ‘right-brain’ way of accessing your thoughts about a topic, in contrast to the ‘left-brain’ way of listing ideas. You write your main topic (for the paragraph [or for the whole paper]) in the center of a blank page and draw a circle around it. Then let yourself ‘free-associate’ words related to that topic and write each word down around the central idea, circling it and drawing a line to the central idea. Other words will come to you that will be linked to these words; circle those and link them with a line to the ‘parent’ idea. Soon, you will feel a completion and be ready to write sentences. This switches your brain to an integrated right-left brain mode and the outcome will be very powerful, with poetic images and strongly evocative words coming to you automatically. You will find that in this ‘natural way’ of writing that the ending sentence of the paragraph will refer back to the beginning topic sentence easily.

Presentation: In giving your talk, it is often helpful to memorize your opening statement, which will give the main idea of your talk and introduce it in an interesting or humorous way. Then use the illustrations or a brief outline to talk from. Then, conclude with a recapitulation of what your main concept was. In other words, tell them what you’re going to tell them (brief outline); tell them; and tell them what you told them (briefly), ending with a memorized concluding statement.