

HOW TO DO THESE ?@*?@#*!! BOOK REPORTS

1. *DON'T* just mindlessly summarize the book, or try to tell me every last thing that it was about. If I need to know that, I'll read the book myself (if I haven't already). Give me the backbone: What's the book about? What are the main ideas? What are the main conclusions, and how does it reach them? And most importantly, what is the significance of the subject matter—how does it tie in with one or more of the Three Great Themes of this course (Plate Tectonics, Geologic Time, and Global Climate)? How does what's in the book fit into the big scheme of things? Why does what the book has to say matter?
2. For purposes of this class, keep your personal opinion of the book out of the report. Resist the temptation to write things like “it wuz hard and had lots ov big wurdz” or “I thought it was LIKE TOTALLY AWESOME!!!!11!!!!”. If you have to give an opinion like this, post it on Amazon.com or something. The reason that I assigned these reviews in the first place was to get you to *learn something*—something that we might not have time to cover in detail in lecture and lab, but that ties in to the Three Great Themes of this course.
3. Start with an introductory paragraph that starts with the “general picture” and narrows down to the book. Something like this (although *don't* copy this exactly):

Plate tectonics is the theory that underpins modern geology. Proposed in the 1910s by Wegener, but confirmed with a series of amazing discoveries beginning in the 1950s, plate tectonics has come from an outlandish notion to the foundation of our understanding of how the earth works. Among other things, it explains why volcanoes are found where they are—and ultimately, why one of them, Krakatau, exploded in 1883, killing over 36,000 people. Simon Winchester's book *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded* explains this eruption in terms of plate tectonics, but it interweaves the science with “human interest” stories that make the science more accessible.

4. Then give me several paragraphs (at least three) that summarize the main points of the book. Think like a journalist when you're writing these: give me the Five Ws (Who, What, Where, When, Why).
5. Finish up with a summary paragraph that briefly recaps what you've said and puts it back into the wider context—how did all the stuff in the book tie in with the big picture?
6. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, and style *all count*. You can lose up to half of your possible points for a badly written report. You are future teachers; you should be able to

write well and write correctly. If this is a problem for you, go to the Writing Center (call 450-5123, or go to <http://www.uca.edu/cfac/writing/owl/> to find out more or to schedule an appointment).

7. Style also counts.

- Don't heap up jargon or fancy words if you don't need them. Good science writing is like a well-oiled machine: nothing is there that doesn't serve the purpose of the whole. If you can cut a word or phrase without changing the meaning, you probably should do it.

- Don't use technical words if you don't know exactly what they mean. If you do, I'll probably laugh like a hyena as I deduct points from your grade.

- Don't write "he experienced lethal consequences and was consumed utterly in cataclysmic, sulfurous, molten flows of glowing, smouldering cerise and crimson hue" when you can write "he fell in the lava and died".

- On the other hand, don't be folksy, slangy, or overly familiar—don't write "he burned his ass up in some red-hot shizznit", either. Keep your style professional, but clear—instead of trying to impress me with your mammoth vocabulary, impress me with your knowledge of the book's subject matter.

- Dry wit *may* be acceptable in small, carefully measured doses. But don't be chatty or jokey.

8. If you commit plagiarism—even if it is relatively minor—you will receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question. Period.

In the "Age of the Internet", it is all too easy for students to cut and paste chunks of text from some on-line source—which may or may not be reputable—into a written assignment. Some will even try to buy entire term papers and pass them off as their own work. Others will copy material directly out of books. This is unacceptable—in the professional world, it could lead to anything from serious embarrassment to loss of a job—and I do not tolerate it in any class.

Here is how to avoid plagiarism:

If you use someone else's exact words, you *must* put them in quotation marks and cite them.

- If you are quoting the book that you're reporting on, you only need to cite the page number that the quote is on. EXAMPLE: If you're writing a report on Simon Winchester's book *The Map That Changed the World*, you might write something like this:

William Smith's work in the coal-mining area near the village of High Littleton led to his most important insights; it "led ultimately to the creation of an entirely new science" (p. 61)

- If you are quoting another source, you must cite the author and date, but also the page numbers where the original quote appears. EXAMPLE:

Evolution depends on inheritance; as Darwin said, “Any variation which is not inherited is unimportant for us.” (Darwin, 1859, p. 12)

Then, of course, you put the full citation into a “Literature Cited” section at the end of your paper:

Darwin, C. 1859. *Origin of Species*. John Murray, London.

- The “Berkeley Rule” for defining plagiarism, which I use and many other schools use as well, is *four consecutive words*—if more than four consecutive words in your paper are identical to the wording of a source, it’s plagiarism, *unless* you use quotation marks and give the full citation. (Exceptions are made for common expressions, such as “it is known that”, “we have discovered that”, and so on. Such expressions are often clichés and thus are lousy style, but their use isn’t plagiarism.)
- Don’t try to dodge the “Berkeley Rule” by pasting in a quote and changing every fifth word, or breaking up long sentences and joining short ones, or similar tricks. That may not violate the letter of the law, but I will still consider it plagiarism and act accordingly.
- Be sparing with direct quotes; don’t try to make a patchwork paper. Use them only if the writer has said something so well that you can’t improve on it. (In liberal arts papers on, say, literature, you often have to include many direct quotes. This is usually not good scientific style.)
- Don’t quote something if you don’t know what it means. The quote could be irrelevant, or even contradict the point you think you’re making. If it contains weird words that you don’t understand, look ‘em up. *Learn* something from writing every essay—*that’s the whole point of doing it in the first place*.

If you use someone else’s ideas, you must cite them, even if you put them in your own words.

- If you get several sentences’ worth of facts and ideas from one source, you only need to cite the source once, at the end of the group of sentences (but at least once in every paragraph).
- Understand the ideas that you’re citing. Students who try and rephrase something that they don’t understand often commit absolutely ridiculous blunders.