

Sedimentary Basin Analysis (GEOL 440/540), Fall 2018

Guidelines for the Term Paper

As you know, the term paper for this course is due Wednesday, December 5, by 5:00 p.m. (no extensions). Your research should be well advanced by now, and you should be ready to start (or have already started) the organization and writing process. Below are a few guidelines and suggestions to help you write your term paper. Be sure to ask me if you have any questions.

- (1) The optimum length for undergraduate students is ~10 pages (double-spaced) including figures and references. Graduate students should produce content to fill ~ 15 pages. For both groups, a bit longer is okay but not expected. Length is less important than good content, quality, organization, ideas, coherent writing, etc. Focus on these things, and check length to make sure you are within expectations. Note that most good paragraphs start with a good “topic sentence” – ask me if you don’t know what this means. And, please paginate.
- (2) For Organization, please include: (1) Introduction: briefly state your topic, what questions you asked or controversies you addressed, sources of information or methods you used, etc.; (2) Results, or Models for xxx (or other appropriate title), with subheadings: present the data, interpretations, concepts, models, etc. in an organized way. Cite all papers from which you got any information; (3) Discussion (length is flexible): discuss **and synthesize** the significance of what you learned, +/- your opinions about things (as long as they are well formed and defended); (4) Conclusions: sum up the main results of your investigation; and (5) References Cited. You may also write an abstract (~ 1/2 page) if you want, it is optional.
- (3) Figures are important for illustrating the concepts, processes, ideas, and models that you will pull from the literature or your own research. You should use figures to help accomplish this. Figures can be copied or scanned from journal articles, theses, etc, and neatly included in your paper. You may also want to draft your own figures. Figure captions should include a citation to the source it was taken from (if not your own drafting), and the paper you cite has to be included in the References section. Figure captions should be typed and included neatly beneath the figure. Do not use the same figure numbers from the original source; create and use your own figure numbers, and refer to them by number in the text, *in order*.
- (4) For References Cited, please use a standard format. I don't care which you use (I suggest choose one of the options in Google Scholar), but you need to choose one, and use it consistently and correctly. All references must be cited in the text of your paper, using standard citation format, and all citations of papers in your text must refer to references that I can find in the reference list. Citations and references must match; I will check this.
- (5) Direct quotations are ok, but use them sparingly, and be sure to do them right. When quoting directly from a paper, put the quoted material in quotes, and at the end of the quotation give the reference and page number, for example: "the world is flat" (Trump et al., 2016, p. 163). Be sure to use this format for anything that you quote verbatim from any text that someone else wrote. This is quite important. The above format is used only when you take a quote directly out of a published paper, book or thesis (there should be few or none in your paper).
- (6) Read the literature as a guide for writing your paper. Please consult published papers for organization, writing style, correct format for citations to your references, etc. Think about content, concepts, how to organize them, writing, syntax, and overall presentation carefully.

To Sum: The key components of a good paper are rigorous thorough content, clear logic, good organization and writing style (i.e. grammatically correct, complete sentences), figures, citations, and references. Please proofread everything – careless mistakes are annoying for the reviewer (me). Keep these things in mind as you plan and write your paper, since they are the main criteria I will use for grading papers, and provide good guidelines for all scientific writing.