**Writing an Online Blog Entry**

**Why blog?**

One important learning objective of this course is to teach students how to communicate with lay-audiences about conservation issues. Policy-makers, the general public, and even many scientists do not have access to academic journal articles. Worse, most academic articles are written in a way that makes them unintelligible to laypeople. For a discipline like Conservation Biology— in which science is explicitly designed to improve management— inaccessibility is simply unacceptable!

In recent years, blogs have emerged as effective avenue for scientists to share their findings— or their colleague’s findings— with a more general audience. For example, the Nature Conservancy’s *Cool Green Science* blog (<http://blog.nature.org/science/)> has taken off and is widely read by scientists and laypeople alike. This assignment and the associated discussion section are designed to provide you with an introduction into online blogging.

**What’s required**

*Choosing an article—* Each student is required to summarize the insights, implications, and/or limitations of an academic journal article for an online course blog. Journal articles must be:

* Peer reviewed and published in an academic journal such as Conservation Biology, Conservation Letters, Ecological Applications, Journal of Applied Ecology, Global Change Biology or others.
* Relevant to conservation
* Recent— published in 2019, 2020, or 2021. Earlier dates are not permitted.

Assigned course readings **cannot** be used. Short perspective pieces are also unacceptable. Students may choose to write their blog based on a review article or modeling paper; however, these formats are generally harder to write about. Proceed at your own risk.

You should have chosen your article by 1/22/2021. Before that date, feel free to email the TAs if you have any questions about your article and its appropriateness for the assignment. After 1/22/2021, the TAs will no longer be helping with article selection.

*Writing the blog*— The blog will be 750-1000 words, targeted for a lay-audience, and modeled after The Nature Conservancy’s Cool Green Science (<http://blog.nature.org/science/)>. Be sure to spice up your blog entry with some photos or figures—this is meant to inspire people! Examples of blogs that Dr. Karp has written are available in the files section of canvas. These examples, however, were not written with all guidelines (listed below) in mind. They should thus be viewed as examples of how blogs should generally look and read, not examples of what is expected for this assignment.

Below is a list of what each blog must contain (in no particular order):

* **A hook**. The first line of the blog must attract the reader’s attention with either an interesting finding from the article, an impressive method that was used, or feel free to get creative with a clever play on words.
* **Section headings**. Blogs are typically written in short paragraphs with snappy section headings used to break up the text and make it more visually attractive.
* **The main finding(s).** Make sure you distill and summarize the core finding(s) from the article. Do not summarize all possible results— pick and choose the most meaningful findings that would be interesting to laypeople and most relevant to conservation
* **The implications**. This is the meat of the blog. Why was this study important? Why should we care? How could the results inform policy/management or how do they improve our knowledge? Are there are big limitations or is any future work needed? (It is possible the answer is no)
* **What the authors did**. Give a brief overview of the main methods/experiments employed. Where did the study take place? What did the scientists actually do? In most cases, this should be a short section— most readers will not be interested in the nitty-gritty of the statistical methods, for example.
* **A picture or figure**. Include at least 1 picture or figure (with a caption) to make your blog more attractive. ***Be sure to choose pictures/figures that are NOT copyrighted. See below for choosing appropriate images.***
* **Some context**. Be sure to include at least a little bit of background to help the reader understand why this article was important. For example, what didn't we know before this article came out? Is there any context we should know about?
* **Clear, jargon-free writing**. Remember, you are writing for a lay-audience so keep the technical terms to a minimum unless they are absolutely necessary. And, as always, make sure to copy-edit your blog to make sure it appears professional.

*Choosing images—* An important part of writing an effective blog is the addition compelling, attractive figures that accent your writing. Such images abound on the internet, but photos and figures represent people’s personal property- even when they are posted on the internet. As such, it is important to carefully abide by copyright laws when choosing photos to post alongside your blog. Even when photos are labeled for reuse (meaning the owner allows them to published on the websites of other people), there may be further restrictions regarding attribution. The procedure below is a surefire way to make sure you are abiding by copyright law and that you are protecting yourself and your institution.

*Google image search:*

1. Visit images.google.com and type in your search phrase (*e.g.,* Peregrine Falcon)
2. Click on tools.
3. Click on usage rights.
4. Click on Creative Commons Licenses
5. Click on the photo you would like to use and then visit the website from which it was taken.
6. On that website, there should be a section on attribution. Read how the author would like to be attributed. If it does not say, then, as a rule, cite the author’s name and a link to the website where you got the image.

If you cannot find a suitable image in google image search, try visiting any of the following websites:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/>  
<https://freephotos.cc/>  
<https://unsplash.com/>

*Turning it in*— Save your blog as a Microsoft word document, and then turn it in electronically using the assignments tab in Canvas. The blog is due by **Jan. 27** at midnight.

*The next steps—* This blog is not just another assignment. I envision this as an opportunity to provide our broader community with an intriguing and digestible source of conservation science. To that end, I have created a **public** website to host blogs from this class. You can see blogs from students in the course last year on this website, the Student Conservation Corner: <https://medium.com/student-conservation-corner>. Note: not all blogs that have been posted on the Student Conservation Corner received great grades. Be sure to pay attention to the assignment description, rather than mimicking the style of the blogs on the Student Conservation Corner.

When you turn in your blog, **please tell us if you do NOT wish to make your blog entry public or if you wish to post it anonymously**. Otherwise, I’ll assume that you are ok with us posting your blog entry and crediting you for your work. After you turn in your blog, the course teaching assistants will grade the blog. The top scoring blogs will be posted on the website sometime in the next year (if you give us permission).