

Journal Writing for GEOL 0160: Monsters of the Abyss: Oceanography and Sea Tales

Baylor Fox-Kemper

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1 Contacts

The professor for this class is: Baylor Fox-Kemper

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Some portions of the website are password-protected to ensure that fair use and copyrights are correctly obeyed as I share images from books, etc. You can access these by using:

username: io

password: ocean

2 Getting Help!

I am usually available by email. My office hours this semester will be most Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30-2:30PM. You can also request an appointment at other times. Just check my calendar at <http://fox-kemper.com/contact> and suggest a time that works for you.

Erica Thieleman, our CAP fellow, will also have office hours on most Fridays 2:30-4 in GeoChem 134. She will be helping you with finding journaling topics, preparing your classroom discussion leading, drafting, and peer reviewing, and you can reach her at mailto:erica_thieleman@brown.edu.

Finally, we have two writing fellows for the class (Sienna Zeilinger and Simon Henriques). They will also be offering help with your draft papers.

3 General Comments on Journals

Many of you have probably kept a personal journal, maybe not for your whole life, but for a while. Most people who do feel very protective of what they wrote, and often destroy or lock the book afterward. . . But, your writing probably improved substantially in making the journal. If you took it seriously, you may have even “found your voice” at that time.

The journal for this class is intended to fill some of the same purposes, and some different. Your entries are private until you choose to make them public, *but you do have to make some of them public*. We will be drawing on the collective experiences and insights of everyone in the class this semester, and the formal method for doing so will be in studying excerpts from your journals.

On the other hand, the parts about finding your voice and becoming a better writer are absolutely intended for this class. That's why I encourage you to write in your journal often and about anything—whether related to class or not. As you begin to find your thoughts on paper, you'll begin to better articulate ideas, summaries, and concepts from class. Obviously, this process will make you a better writer. No one will dig through your journal to see what you've written, so you can be confident in privacy for most of what you write.

4 Length of Excerpts

You will choose the length of your journal excerpts to use for the first and maybe third paper. Your presenting colleagues may trim your submitted excerpt down a bit for use in class (e.g., to fit on one slide).

However, the length you choose in the journal is up to you. Don't push for more length, but do think before you scribble—at least a bit. Try to focus your energy into a few succinct statements that can be reused. Try to shoot somewhere between a sentence and a page. If you tend toward shorter ones, do more. If longer, try to do more with them.

The reading from Maria Mitchell and Fridtjof Nansen are excellent examples of excerpts used in a longer composed or collected narrative. This style will be the basis of your first paper.

5 Key Concepts from Class

I hope that some of the key concepts or quotations discussed in class will inspire you to write down what you didn't get a chance to say in class. That can be a basis for some of the best papers. To further this approach, I'll be posting the slides from class soon after class.

6 Key Passages from the Reading

When something strikes you in the reading, copy it. Then comment on it. Try to explain just how it affects you and why. With proper attribution, a well-selected excerpt from a reading can count as your excerpt from your journal.

7 Learn to Summarize

As any of you who use Twitter already know, it is very difficult to say anything profound quickly. It is even harder to hit the salient points of a description. It is harder still to hit the salient points and capture the “feel” of the situation. Being able to rapidly and accurately summarize a discussion or reading or scientific lecture is one of the most valuable skills you can learn in school. For years, I have been asking students to summarize—lectures, to initiate a peer review, to rehash my lectures back to me—all toward learning this skill. It generally takes about a dozen tries before you really nail it. Then, you'll never forget.