**Astrobiology Survey -- First Year Seminar 420:029:0008 -- Fall 2012 Essays – Final Version 09/17/2012**

**Essay 1 – Astrobiology Research Project Reflections – Due October 1**

Answer the following questions:

1. What is the goal of the research project?

2. What exactly was your job in the research project?

3. What did you contribute to the research project?

4. What was your opinion of the research project?

5. What did you learn from the research project?

Write a 5 paragraph essay, with each paragraph dedicated to answering one of the questions. The topic sentence of each paragraph should address the question and be followed by 3-4 supporting points / sentences in each paragraph.

In addition to turning in your essay, also turn in a screen shot / screen capture of your Zooniverse profile to document the research work that you did.

**Essay 2 – Are We Alone? – Due October 15**

Answer the following question - Are we alone in the universe? – by answering the following three questions:

1. Do you believe there is unintelligent life in the universe?

2. Do you believe there is intelligent life in the universe?

3. How would the discovery of intelligent life in the universe change you and your perspective of the world around you?

The essay should consist of 5 paragraphs: an introductory paragraph, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph. The topic sentence of each body paragraph should address a question and be followed by 3-4 supporting points / sentences in each paragraph.

**Essay 3 – Contact Simulation Reflections – Due October 29**

Answer the following questions:

1. Describe the general principles and concepts you used to develop and construct your alien

2. What did you contribute to the Contact simulation?

3. What was your opinion of the Contact simulation?

4. What surprised you most about the Contact simulation?

5. What did you learn from the Contact simulation?

Write a 5 paragraph essay, with each paragraph dedicated to answering one of the questions. The topic sentence of each paragraph should address the question and be followed by 3-4 supporting points / sentences in each paragraph.

**Guide to Essay Writing**

Essays submitted in the course should be (a) in no larger than a 12 point font, (b) double-spaced, (c) have 1 inch margins all around, (d) no more than 2 pages in length, and (e) submitted in PDF or .doc format to my e-mail address or to myself in class on paper.

**Jerry Pournelle on writing:**

Once you have learned to write good sentences, sit down and write. When my sons began to write essays -- term papers, originally I suppose -- I told each in turn the same thing. Write everything you can think of about the subject. Everything.

Now go through and list the topic sentence of each paragraph. If you find paragraphs that don't have a topic sentence, you have a problem: fix that. If you don't know what a paragraph is, and have no notion of topic sentences, get that corrected at once. (Just read on.) Once you have that list of topic sentences, decide if that's really the order you want to present the information in. It probably won't be. Organize the way you want it.

Fill in the gaps, expand points that need expanding, and do one final rewrite pass. Voila. If this is a term paper you will probably get an A if you knew anything at all about the subject. If you're writing for sale, you probably need more feel for how such things are organized in the publication you are aiming for. Study your market. But recall the technique: it will serve you well for a long time.

On Paragraphs: I once had to tell a co-author (Not Niven) what a paragraph was. He kept handing me material that was dramatic but paragraphed horribly. Finally I asked what he thought he was doing, and he confessed that no one had ever taught him what a paragraph is.

"A paragraph," I said, "is a group of sentences organized around one complete thought which is stated in the topic sentence."

It was as if a light had appeared his head. He now paragraphs well. Of course in fiction, characters don't always speak in paragraphs, nor do they organize what they are saying very coherently; still, you will find that characters in fiction do and must speak a lot more coherently than people do in real life. Real conversation transcribed is sometimes incomprehensible, usually ungrammatical, and often boring.