

News Article Project

GSCI115 Earth Systems, Cycles, & Human Impact

The Task:

You are a reporter working for a newsletter written for JMU students. Your assignment is to research (Part 1) and write (Part 2 and 3) a news article that describes and evaluates new scientific research about the impact of climate change on humans and the natural environment. Detailed instructions on how to complete the assignment are provided below. You should also read the grading rubric (on Blackboard) before you turn in your article.

Goals of this project:

- 1) Find and evaluate scientific resources available to you as a student and citizen;
- 2) Communicate information about climate science correctly and in an understandable, interesting way.

Due dates: **Part 1** (research and outline) **due Feb 28** at the start of class
 Part 2: (draft; group comments and editing in class) **due April 8** at the start of class
 Part 3 (article) **due April 22** at the start of class

Assessment:

This project is worth **165 points** total. **Part 1** is worth **25 points**; **Part 3** is worth **140 points**. **Part 2** will be counted as an **in-class activity worth 10 points**- other students will read your draft article and make comments; you will do the same for them. I **strongly encourage** you to look at these instructions and the grading rubrics **before** you turn in each part of the project, to make sure you followed directions and included all required information.

Who is the audience?

It's always a good idea to know your audience. In this case, the audience is your fellow JMU students- the ones taking this course, as well as the ones that are not in GSCI115. This means you should write in a way that will interest a college student, and you should explain any scientific terminology that might be unfamiliar to people not taking this class.

Detailed Instructions

Part 1: Research your topic (due Feb. 28)

Before you can write, you need to find a peer-reviewed scientific journal article written in the last 8 years (2000 or later) which contains scientific results you think are interesting.

What is a peer-reviewed scientific journal article? Please refer to the information sheet provided by Jerry Gill (gillgl@jmu.edu), the librarian who will visit us in class. Please ask one of us for help if you are unsure about an article you find or need additional help.

a) Find an issue that interests you. We will use the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II Report, “Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability” as a basis for finding interesting topics to cover and as a way to locate a peer-reviewed scientific journal article related to your chosen topic.

- This report can be found online at: <http://www.ipcc-wg2.org/> (Click on “THE FULL WORKING GROUP II CONTRIBUTION TO THE IPCC FOURTH ASSESSMENT REPORT AVAILABLE HERE” at the top of the page). The report is divided into chapters. You can click on the name of each chapter and it will open as a .pdf file.
- Look over the “Summary for Policymakers” and the “Technical Summary” to get an overview of the topics and conclusions covered in this section of the IPCC report. Find two or three topics that seem interesting and novel to you, and then choose one topic to cover once you have found a scientific research article on that topic (see below). Remember, a good reporter is someone that finds some piece of news that others **haven’t** covered yet. It is more likely that your article will stand out as “breaking news!” if you **don’t choose an article everyone else is likely to write about**. In other words, **don’t pick the first topic you see, or one that has already been in the news** so often that it will be difficult for you to create a fresh new angle on the topic.

b) Find a peer-reviewed scientific journal article. Once you find some interesting leads, you can hunt down a peer-reviewed scientific journal article by following the references made in the report. Some call this “reference mining,” since it involves digging through the text and bibliography of a well-written report or article to find a good resource.

- You should see numbers in brackets next to the paragraph describing results in the Summary chapters. These numbers refer to chapters and sections in this Working Group II report. For example, [3.4] refers to the fourth section of Chapter 3 (Freshwater Resources and their Management). You can open Chapter 3, find section 3.4, and read in more detail about your topic (in this example, effects of climate change on freshwater resources at the surface of Earth). Within the text are references to the scientific papers whose findings are summarized in the IPCC report (for example, Nohara et al. 2006).
- If you scroll to the end of the .pdf file, there is a bibliography of all of the scientific papers summarized in that chapter. The reference to Nohara et al. 2006 is found on page 207: Nohara, D., A. Kitoh, M. Hosaka and T. Oki, 2006:

Impact of climate change on river runoff. J. Hydrometeorol., 7, 1076-1089. Note: some of these papers may be “review” articles- they may summarize the results from many previous scientific research articles and do not contain a description of a hypothesis, scientific methods or results. **Do NOT choose a review article.**

- You can locate your journal article by using the periodical locator on the JMU library website: <http://www.lib.jmu.edu/journals/>. Even if JMU does not subscribe to the journal, you can obtain ANY journal article by using the interlibrary loan (ILL) system through the JMU library website. It usually takes a day or two to get an article through ILL, so do not procrastinate! It **WILL** be necessary to look up more than one journal paper to locate an article that is well-written, available, and interesting enough to use as the basis for your news report.

c) Fill in the Part 1 worksheet. Once you are satisfied with the peer-reviewed scientific journal article you found, fill out the worksheet for Part 1 and turn in a paper copy by **Feb. 28 at the beginning of class.**

Part 2: Draft of paper (Due April 8)

This is a chance to get feedback from other students on how to improve your article. You will bring a paper copy of a draft of your article to class. Your fellow students will provide helpful, constructive feedback on your draft paper. By participating in this editing session, you will receive 10 points for an In-class activity.

Part 3: Write the article (Due April 22)

A good news report is well-written, concise, and interesting. It strives to tell the story in a fair, impartial manner. It describes the issue in a way that the audience can understand, and gives them a reason to want to know about the issue.

a) Examples: I’ve provided some examples of good science reporting below. These articles are from the newsletter *Geotimes*, published by the American Geological Institute (AGI).

“Pakistan’s wetter weather linked to global warming”

<http://www.geotimes.org/apr06/WebExtra042806.html>

“Pyro babies”

<http://www.geotimes.org/dec00/fire.html>

“Confusion corner: Antarctica”

http://www.geotimes.org/mar02/NN_antarctica.html

“Middens mark Southwest cold snap”

http://www.geotimes.org/nov05/NN_SWmiddens.html

“La Nina controls Amazon floodplain”

http://www.geotimes.org/dec03/NN_Amazonplain.html

b) Guidelines: Since this is a class assignment, there are several additional guidelines for you to follow. I highlight a few criteria here, but you should **look at the Part 2 grading**

rubric handout on Blackboard before you write your article and again before you turn it in! Don't cheat yourself out of points because you forgot to include all of the requirements.

-Title: Make sure you include a title! It should be informative, but catchy.

-Length: I am not going to count the exact number of words in your article. However, most of the examples I gave you above are about 700-800 words long. This is about 2-3 pages of single-spaced text, depending on which font and size you use. Use this as a guideline for the length of your own article. I would much rather read a well-written article that's 699 words long instead of a poorly written article that's 1200 words long.

-Quoting: In the examples above, the writer often quotes the authors of the journal article or other experts. In most cases, the quotes are from an *interview*- the writer actually talked to the authors. I don't expect you to interview the authors (although you are welcome to try, as long as you are polite and explain the assignment to them). **DO NOT use direct quotes from the peer-reviewed journal articles. You should rewrite the ideas in your own words, and then reference the source in the text like this (Johnson 2008) or like this "according to recent work by Johnson (2008)..."**. I can't tell that you understood the article if you just cut and paste text into quotes. I will interpret this is a lack of understanding on your part, and will grade down accordingly. You might want to include a quote from another resource, but choose quotes that illustrate a specific point you are already writing about yourself in the article. Be careful- a page full of quotes from other resources does not make good writing either, and will be judged accordingly. If in doubt, restate the idea yourself. Copying and pasting text directly from any source is a violation of the Honor Code and you will receive a zero for the entire project.

-Bibliography: Unlike the *Geotimes* examples, you should include a bibliography at the end of your article. This should be pretty easy to compile, since you already found your reference in Part 1 of the project. You can use other resources in addition to the peer-reviewed scientific journal article if you wish. You can use any standard reference format you choose- see CheckCite on the JMU library webpage for style guides: <http://www.lib.jmu.edu/help/checkcite/>

c) Turn in your article! Here's how to turn in your final product.

- Turn in a paper copy of the cover sheet (available on Blackboard) and your article in class. We will first discuss your projects in groups, so everything needs to be completed before class begins.

-Turn in an electronic copy of your article using the Digital Dropbox feature in Blackboard. This is optional, but I encourage you to do this as a "backup," and also because some of you may actually want to make a real online newsletter, and it's much easier to have the files already in electronic format, preferably Word (.doc).