# Writing a Book Synopsis for Oceanography

**Purpose**: For the student to delve more deeply into oceanography topic(s) of interest.

## Books You Can Read for Extra Credit

You may earn **up to ten points maximum** extra credit through this exercise. The points will be added to your final class exercise.

Read one or more of the following books and write a **1-2 page synopsis** of the book, relating what we discuss in class to what you’ve learned by reading the book. More information on what is expected from a synopsis is given below.

 *The Longitude*, by Dava Sobel (up to 3 points)

 *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* by Mark Kurlansky (up to 3 points)

 *The Two-Mile Time Machine* by Richard Alley (up to 3 points)

 One additional book only with prior approval of Dr. Holmes.

First and each synopsis are due any time. You may re-write and turn it back in for one additional point. The **last date we will accept any synopsis or re-write is December 2**.

## Questions to Ask Yourself While Reading

* What is this book about? What is the Big Theme of the book?
* Why am I being asked to read it for this class?
* How does this piece of history fit into the bigger picture of what I am learning in oceanography class?
* What topics that we discuss in class are enlarged upon in this book?

## What to Write: The Book’s Content

Comment on the ***content*** of the book (the topics discussed in the book) rather than the writer’s style, the book appearance, the way the book did or did not appeal to you. The goal is to relate the content of the book, the factual information presented, to what you are learning in class.

Think about *why* the book was chosen for this class: the topic(s) discussed in the book are also topics discussed in the class. Relate what you are reading to what has been discussed in class and/or practiced in lab in your synopsis. Write about the relationship of the book topic to a specific class topic;and add any new information you obtained from the book. Some of the books do contain human interest and it is ok to discuss the impact of whatever the topic is on humans and society in general.

Re-write words from the book in your own words – do not use direct quotations. See the website: <http://plagiarism.org> and <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/> for more on plagiarism and how to avoid it.

**Give the citation,** the reference: the author’s name, the date of publication, the book’s title, the publisher. Don’t forget your own name! Indicate whether the submission is a re-write.

Example: Rowling, J. K., 1998. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. Scholastic.

## Grammar Counts!

**Use this opportunity to improve your writing skills,** one of the most important, marketable skills you can learn**.** Writing is a **skill**, *not a gift* that you have or don’t have. Everybody can improve their writing.

Use the past tense (he did; she said) for events that occurred in the past.

Make sure that your verb agrees with your subject. If the subject is plural, the verb should be plural as well. If the subject is singular, so should the verb be.

If the terms “subject” and “verb” are not clear to you, you need to find out what they are.

Make sure that when you use a demonstrative adjective (these, that, those, this), it refers to something that precedes that adjective in the sentence. Otherwise it is unclear what you are referring to.

*This makes it go around. (Useful only if you are pointing to something)*

Capitalize words that are proper names. Do not capitalize words to show emphasis.

If any sentence in your synopsis lasts for more than three typewritten lines, read it over and see where you can cut it into two sentences. Shorter sentences are easier on the reader.

Each paragraph that you write should have *one coherent topic*. Make sure there are no superfluous sentences. They may be great sentences, but if they do not directly address the one topic of the paragraph, they must be either deleted or put into another paragraph.

## Rubric for Assigning Points

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| **Criteria** | **Poorly Done****No credit** | **Well Done****Half credit** | **Outstanding****Full credit** | **Points / 2pt book** |
| 1. Necessary identifiers: citation, student name, etc are present; length is appropriate | More than one item missing; too long or too short | One key item missing; too long or too short | All items present; one-two pages | 0.5 |
| 2. Grammar, Spelling, Focus:No grammatical or spelling mistakes; no superfluous sentences; no discussion of writing style, emotions generated, etc.  | Multiple errors: e.g. subject does not agree with verb; multiple topics in one paragraph; lack of focus on topic | More than two or poor focus on oceanography topics | No-one mistake(s); sharp focus on the topics | 0.5 |
| 3. Content: Writer demonstrates understanding of the book’s purpose, its theme. | Purpose of book misperceived.  | Purpose of book poorly perceived; important points of book not addressed | Writer demonstrates understanding of the book’s topic(s) | 1 |
| 4. Content: Writer demonstrates knowledge of how the topic of the book fits into and enhances topics taught in class lecture. | Topic of book not tied into any class topic(s) or all wrong topic(s) | Topic of book tied into wrong topic(s) or major topic missed.  | Topic of book well-connected to course content; displays enhanced understanding of topic(s) | 1 |