Synthesis Paper Guidelines

You should think of this paper as you would a research or term paper; it should be a full write-up of the complete solution to the particular problem, including up-to-date references regarding what is known about the relevant aspects of the particular problem that was posed. As you write your paper, do not simply run through how your group solved the problem (although that is a part). What you will be writing is a synthesis: one in which you integrate (e.g., synthesize) your results and studies into a treatment of the concepts in terms of the problem at hand.

My expectations for your term paper are that (1) your effort is completely original (i.e., you wrote it alone), and (2) that it covers the Problem completely.

General: Use current pertinent literature.
- Use scientific or technical journals for your report. Do NOT use encyclopedias (including Wikipedia), or re-chewed popular journals (like Discovery, Natural History, or Earth). Try and read the original, pertinent literature in the original scientific publications by the people that did the science in the first place.
- The problem with books is that most of the information published within them is out of date by the time you read the book. You may use books as a part of your research, but may not solely rely upon them.
- The web can be helpful, but the web is a double-edged sword – use it sparingly.
- You almost certainly will find that you need to use either the Olin library for hard copy or electronic journal links at the Library’s website to obtain the journals you need in addition to the papers supplied as .pdf links.
- You will need to learn to use keywords in various databases (Georef; BioOne Online Journals; JSTOR Biological Sciences Collection; Web of Science; Anthropology Plus) to identify the journal articles that may be of greatest use in solving your problem. You will become very familiar with the Help With Assignments link at: http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/library/

Format:
- It should be computer generated and no longer than 10 pages.
- All text should be double-spaced, with 1” margins, and left justified.
- It should be in 12-pt font with a conventional typescript (e.g., Times New Roman).
- It should be in PALAIOS format (You can find examples of this format by consulting that journal’s website: http://palaios.sepmonline.org/ and downloading the .pdf file for authors).
- The first page should contain the Problem Title (centered), the names of the group members (with that of the Synthesizer bolded & italicized) and the date (both, right justified). In the remaining space the text should begin. The first page should NOT be
An Abstract should follow and be bold-faced.

All pages should be numbered in the bottom center as “Page #.”

Indent paragraphs; do NOT leave a line between each.

Section titles should be CAPITALIZED and center-justified.

Formal Linnaean groups should be capitalized, except when not in formal form (e.g., Bivalvia; bivalves; and Therapsida; therapsids).

Genera and species are always italicized (or underlined); Genera are capitalized; species are not (e.g., *Dicynodon feliceps*).

Citations should be in a section entitled “References Cited,” which will include only those references that you cite. The References Cited section should be single-spaced, and hanging indents (*Word: Format-Paragraph-Special Hanging*) must be used.

Contents:
1. *Abstract* – This is a brief statement describing what the problem was about, your approach, and what you concluded (one paragraph).
2. *Approach* – Describe how you went about solving the problem and answering the questions associated with the problem.
   a. Be specific about assumptions made, the facts that support them, and the sources of information used.
   b. Lay out explicitly all calculations (when used). Remember to use and list appropriate units, and keep them straight. Equations when appropriate are expected; please number them.
   c. Use appropriate terms throughout.
3. *Conclusions* – Describe what you can and cannot conclude regarding the answer(s) to the problem. Identify possible approaches to those parts of the problem for which you could not reach conclusions. DO NOT summarize your paper (e.g., write a second Abstract) in the Conclusions section.

Other: Do not make dumb grammatical errors. For example:

- Data are plural; datum is singular.
- It’s is a contraction for “it is;” its is possessive.
- Utilize the resources provided by Miller Library’s Farnsworth Writing Center several days before the synthesis paper is due.

Tips on How to Write (the Cliff Notes version):

- Write a thesis statement (that is the focal point or raison d’être) of your entire work.
- This statement should be the last sentence of your first paragraph.
- Outline your work. The outline should be composed of the topical sentences of each paragraph.
✓ Each paragraph should have a topical sentence at the beginning; the remainder of the paragraph should be an explication of that topic sentence.
✓ Each sentence must precisely follow from the one before in a logical manner.
✓ Each paragraph must precisely follow from the one before, and relate directly to the thesis statement.
✓ Read lots of well-written literature (i.e., required readings in the other Africa courses) before bed each night.
✓ Presto! You’re a good writer. Well, you’re an OK writer. That is, you’ll get by. But to be a real writer, it will take something else...

**Good basic advice:** Write succinctly, choosing your words thoughtfully and carefully. Remember the old adage: *“If I had more time I’d have written it shorter!”*

Extra words do not equal to extra quality. That’s why poetry is so hard to write!

**Revisions:** We all can improve upon our written presentation of information. The problem with a poor initial submission is that the writer did not take sufficient time to think about the material and how it would be presented best. Too often, it is assumed that the development of a paper within 24 hours of it being due is sufficient time to look intelligent. It’s not. Therefore, you will see that there has been a concerted effort in the evaluation of your synthesis, and you will have the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit it for reconsideration.

- When you get your paper back, look over carefully all of the colored marks. There may be more than one color on your paper. Don’t panic. Make sure that you understand them. Ask me if you don’t.
- When you resubmit your paper (Version 2), please append to it Version 1 (colored marks and all).
- Bold and underline the name of the **Revisor** in the first page of any revised version.