

Introduction: When you read a paper, there are a number of questions you should be asking yourself. Keep the following questions in mind as you do your reading, and then go through this list after you finish it. You should be able to answer each one of these questions by the time we discuss the paper in class.

- What are the authors' main arguments?
- What evidence do the authors present to support their claims?
- Do the authors make any claims not backed up by evidence, either their own or as cited from the works of other authors?
- Are the authors misinterpreting any of the evidence they have presented?
- Is there other applicable evidence which is not presented or discussed?
- Do you agree with the authors' conclusions?
- What are the implications of the conclusions which the authors have drawn?
- How could the evidence and conclusions presented in this research be misinterpreted, applied to inappropriate situations, or used to make misinformed decisions?
- Are there any questions left unanswered?
- What would be the next logical steps to take in researching this topic further?
- Why do you think the authors chose to research and write about this topic? What were they hoping to achieve?
- Was the research undertaken or the paper written with any influence from outside sources or with hidden motives or agenda?

Reading is not a passive exercise. Keep a pen or pencil in hand. You should be underlining, scribbling in the margins, and taking notes. Do not use highlighters as they will fade over the

years, and, speaking from experience, you will be surprised how many times after college you will refer back to a paper that was in one of your course packets! It will be necessary to read many sections more than once to understand them fully. Also, when reading scientific writing it is common to flip back and forth between pages to check results, how the researchers produced them, and whether the conclusions they drew are supported by them. Some people like to skim a paper before delving into it; others do a thorough reading and then go back and review the most crucial parts. The most effective readers frequently do both!

Assignment: In our discussions, we will address the questions listed above and many more. For each paper (including the occasional commentary), seven discussion leaders will be chosen. With twelve papers to be read in the class, each one of you will have the opportunity to be a discussion leader three times. As a discussion leader, your responsibilities include handing in a question and a comment the day of the discussion, leading the discussion in one of the small groups, and writing a brief summary of your classmates' answers and responses to your question and comments.

At the beginning of the day on which the paper will be discussed, turn in both a question and a comment about the paper (together approximately 300 words). Your question should be one which incites discussion. A question that simply asks which three different biodiversity estimates the authors use to test their hypothesis needs little thoughtful contemplation and requires little more than turning to the right page to find the answer. A good question might ask why an author chose to utilize those three estimates while ignoring one which is much higher from another well-respected source that you learned about from your textbook reading. Be creative with your question, but take care to ensure that it is within the scope of this class. Anticipate the possible answers to your question.

In addition to this question, you are also asked to comment on the paper, either as a whole or on some aspect of it. Is there a line which you find upsetting or disturbing? Why? Do you feel this paper is so important that no one should be allowed to graduate from college without having read it? Are you inspired, disappointed, shocked, or hopeful? Your comments should reflect how *you* feel about the paper. To prepare yourself for the discussion, also try to imagine the possible reactions of your classmates to your comment. Are you expecting others to feel the same, or do you foresee yourself in a position where you will encounter strong resistance to your opinion?

Your questions and comments will be used to initiate the discussions. As a discussion leader, you will be responsible for guiding the dialogue in your small groups. In both your small groups and in the class as a whole, you are required to pay particular attention to how others answer your question and react to your comment. Take notes as you will be required to turn in summary of these responses and your own reaction to them the following Tuesday (approximately 500 words).