continuous assessments

ENV1101

assessments,
consciously designed and
aligned with the core tenets
of my teaching philosophy....

AUTHENTICITY

Authentic assessments are meaningful activities and tasks that let you show that you can apply vital knowledge and skills. By 'meaningful', I mean realistic and complex enough to replicate the same contexts that test professionals. After all, university is supposed to prepare you for your careers.

DIVERSITY. EQUITY. EMPOWERMENT.

You are all individuals. And each of you deserves a chance to shine. To level the playing field, I create flexible assessments that cater to different strengths and give you choices.

SETTING THE BAR HIGH

Students are more likely to do well when educators hold them to high standards. So, I require you to apply higher-order skills. Not just any old skills, but the core 21st century competencies aka 4Cs (creativity, critical-thinking, collaboration, communication) that are so vital to solving the environmental crisis.

TRANSPARENCY

How can I justify setting the bar high without giving you a road map to success? To make my expectations clear, I give you all my grading rubrics ahead of time.

NOTE. To pass ENV1101, you must COMPLETE ALL assignments

Joanna Coleman, PhD

environmental blog (30 %)
Ending 13-November-2020

WHAT?

This is where you chronicle your environment-related reflections in a forum that lets you communicate with a wider audience and so contribute to building a community.

WHY?

Blogging is a marketable skill. Professionals in diverse fields have to maintain blogs, and blogs are increasingly important on the Internet – on Tumblr alone, there were 496 million blogs in April 2020 (7 % increase in one year).

This assignment gives you an avenue to establish a positive Internet presence. Prospective employers often check out what job applicants do online. So, by the time you graduate, it's good to have made intellectual contributions that go beyond social media.

This blog is a durable record of your learning and how your thought process evolved. This is your chance to deepen your understanding of specific environmental issues as you **critically analyse** outside sources and develop informed views, which you can express openly. But this blog being your global platform, you must carefully consider how to present yourself, so this assignment helps you get better at tailoring writing to readers and practicing academic honesty (vital for a publicly visible blog).

Finally, blogs are great platforms to give and receive feedback, and this assignment is partly judged based on how much interest it generates and your reaction to that interest. Thus, you develop better observation skills and learn by reading and thinking critically about your peers' blogs. Blogs also encourage experimentation and creativity.

HOW? Blog on **one environmental theme**. Endless possibilities. Here are SOME ideas.

- Perform and document a study on an environmental question (do primary research),
- Explore a specific environmental problem or controversy from different perspectives,
- Examine the application of science, technology or grassroots efforts to challenges,
- Describe your personal 1101 learning journey (but don't chronicle lecture content),
- Critically assess environment-related news reported by mainstream media
- Develop a well-informed personal strategy for contributing to environmental change.

Post **REGULARLY** (once a week, i.e., 7 days apart).

First, **submit a plan by the end of week 2 (18h00, 21-Aug-2020)** using the "ENV1101 blog plan" template on LumiNUS (change "YOUR NAME" in the filename to your actual name). Include your theme, a rough outline and a draft of your 1st one. I'll give you feedback ASAP, and then you can start – the **1st post** must be up **by the end of week 4**. I read and evaluate blogs weekly but stop at **18h00 on 13-Nov.** But by all means, keep blogging after that.

more guidelines

Your blog should include reviews and opinion (of others' ideas and/or work), but emphasise your original thinking).

It should also include active links to relevant sources (including journal articles), news stories, other blogs, etc.

tips

There's plenty of advice available online and lots of examples of great environment blogs to inspire you. Consult widely, but these resources may be helpful / inspiring.

How to write great blog content

15 amazing environmental blogs - Two real gems are YaleEnvironment360 and Grist.

You can view your seniors' blogs here and ask me to highlight really great ones (IMO).

dos & don'ts

1. You must use the NUS tool for creating and maintaining a blog.
2. Please complete this Google form, so I have your blog URL. I'll collate a list of blogs here.
3. Post length: 100-500 words. I **won't read** ones that are shorter / longer by > 10 %.
4. DO start by 'introducing' yourself and your theme, so your aim and interest are clear.
5. DO aim for a blog that is cohesive and shows you have evolved over the term.
6. DO 'sell' your blog. The more inviting, the more readers you'll attract. Keeping them interested depends on compelling content, regular posts and visual appeal.
7. DO link to other relevant sites, sources, your peers' blogs, your other posts, etc.
8. DO write plainly in your own voice (more like how you speak than like academic writing). Avoid complex, flowery language and jargon. Your target audience is the public.
9. DO comment on your peers' blogs – this builds a community and counts as participation.
10. DO blog regularly. DON'T leave this to the last minute and rush out a flurry of posts.
11. DON'T backdate / falsify post dates – that's academic dishonesty.
12. DO prioritise quality over quantity – look at the rubric. DON'T publish a flurry of posts for me to grade at the end just to reach a certain number of them (I won't read them).
13. DO use imagery.
14. PLAGIARISM (avoid all the following – blogs with plagiarism get a zero grade)
    Using imagery without proper attribution / using copyrighted imagery
    Copy-pasting text from other sources – your blog must be fully in your own words
    Taking anyone else's ideas – use a reference list or an active link to the source
    Creating a parallel, but different version of an existing blog

group sustainability project (30 %)
Final (week 12) Tutorial

WHAT? You **form eight groups (5-6 ppl each)** and develop a vision for a sustainable future. Each group presents its project in a fair (online). Projects may be viewed by faculty members associated with BES and further afield, your peers and other community members.

WHY? This project is authentic for at least five reasons. *ONE,* it lets you hone one of the most vital of all workplace skills: **collaboration**. *TWO,* you get to practice your public speaking and oral **communication** skills – two requirements in most careers. *THREE, t*his is a chance to get **creative** and **think outside the box** (something we must do to achieve sustainability). *FOUR,* you not only carry out and submit a **research** project for evaluation (something many professionals do), but also **create** a deliverable with real applicability to sustainability goals. *FIVE,* by engaging with multiple faculty and other community members, you can **network** and showcase your skills to people who could prove instrumental in your careers.

HOW? First *ask yourselves,* what is sustainability and how do we create a better world? Next, ID **ONE** sustainability challenge (product / system you deem worthy of sustainable development analysis due to its environmental impacts. It can be anything and on any scale from small (classroom, apartment, etc.) to global. Once you settle on an issue, propose a **novel solution** to reduce the impacts.

Your **solution** must be **well-researched** and **practical**. Structure your presentation of it into logical sections (e.g., ID the problem, your methods and the solution), but devote the most time to the solution. Basically, your goal is to portray what you accomplished from start to finish and place your project in context.

You may **present in any medium** you like. **Some ideas**: short video, Prezi, brochure (with oral explanations), business plan, website, educational campaign. But you'll probably have some powerpoint component. Bear in mind the forum: an online fair, where we (the whole class and other attendees) will hear about your projects. Time limit: **18 minutes + 5 minutes** for Q&A.

This is a **self-starting project**, so start early. Feel free to ask to meet with me ASAP to get feedback on your plan. Each group gets a **maximum of two 15-min. meetings** with me.

You will vote on how your group project grades are calculated...

Option 1. All group members get the same grade.
Option 2. Combo of base group grade (for all members), worth 80 % and grade for individual contribution (based on peer reviews by all teammates), worth 20 %.

Please fill out this Google form to give me the info I need to evaluate you and vote on your preferred grading scheme. The deadline is the end of week 4 (18h00 Friday, 4 September).

I will also ask you to give feedback to your peers on their projects.

participation (10 %)
No date - it all counts

Now that you're in university, you deserve the opportunity to be responsible for your own learning, and to play an active role in growing your ability to think independently, critically and creatively. So your participation is expected & vital, and it counts.

WHY?

Grading participation is an authentic assessment because in the "real world", employees are evaluated based on more than just productivity and quality of work. Soft skills count. A lot.

But being judged on your participation helps you in other key ways.

In participating actively, you improve your ability to think critically, especially about issues that are complex and/or controversial. And sharing your views forces you to articulate your ideas and submit them to critical review. Meanwhile, active listening (a skill you should strive to pick up) exposes you to alternate ways of interpreting and using information.

Decades of pedagogical research shows that students who participate do better than those who don't when it comes to recalling and applying knowledge later.

HOW?

Grading participation isn't without pitfalls. In particular, students and educators bemoan subjectivity and unclear expectations. Some say grading participation penalises those who are introverted and quiet. But hey – a person can be slower to speak up than a chatterbox but no less engaged, and very extroverted students can sometimes dominate and even be detrimental to the class dynamic.

Some also say educators cannot observe everything that goes on in class and so cannot appreciate the full picture of each student's contribution. So, I assess participation based on a holistic evaluation of your overall contribution to the class, using two main components.

Holistic rubric

In class, I note your: oral contributions, preparedness, attentiveness, keenness, responsiveness to your peers, etc., and grade you on a rubric (which you have). I also evaluate your engagement in the blogging community (frequency & quality of engagement with your peers) and in other activities.

You *may* use the participation rubric to assess yourself and argue for the grade you think you deserve, so you should continuously document your contributions. Halfway through the sem, you *may* ask to chat with me about how you are doing so far. We can compare assessments (yours and mine, which hopefully are not too disparate) and discuss ways to improve.

Self-assessment

other details

In your written work, I mainly grade you on content. But writing well is a vital life skill, and written assignments are where you showcase your professional abilities in the best possible light. So, I also judge your ability to create easy-to-read work you can be proud of.

Please write in **STANDARD ENGLISH**. If you don't know what that means, find out. Try to avoid Singlish or colloquialisms. While totally appropriate in spoken conversations, they are not understood outside SG and so should not be used in writing, especially for a community of learners and external readers that includes non-Singaporeans (as in your blogs). Please use simple language and be concise. Make sentences short and sweet. Like this.

In general, my suggested edits are just intended to help you write better, not to penalise minor errors. BUT, if I have trouble reading your writing because of major organisation issues, typos, grammar / style errors, verbosity or stuffy language, expect your grade to suffer, potentially a lot depending how much I struggle. In my experience, tools such as Grammarly (check out the free version) are invaluable.

How to use info from other sources

Always respect the NUS code of conduct on academic honesty. Paraphrasing (putting all info totally in your own words) combined with proper citations (APA style OR numbered, as in the journal Nature) is the only acceptable way to do this in most assignments at NUS. Note: You may either use your blog to practice (and let me help you improve), or just give active hyperlinks to sources (to reduce post length). See examples below. ONLY use quotes when paraphrasing distorts the original meaning.

APA FORMAT

The urgent need to fill some of the most basic knowledge gaps in SE Asia is clear from a recent exercise (Coleman et al 2019) that identified the region's most pressing conservation research questions.

Coleman JL, Ascher JS,… & Carrasco LR (2019) Top 100 research questions for biodiversity conservation in Southeast Asia. *Biological Conservation* **234**, 211-220.

NUMBERED CITATIONS, AS IN NATURE

The urgent need to fill some of the most basic knowledge gaps in SE Asia is clear from a recent exercise [1] that identified the region's most pressing conservation research questions.

1. Coleman, JL et al *Biol. Conserv.* **234**, 211-220 (2019).

HYPERLINK TO SOURCE (slicker for a blog, i.e., avoids need for reference list at the end)

The urgent need to fill some of the most basic knowledge gaps in SE Asia is clear from a recent exercise that identified the region's most pressing conservation research questions.

designed with learning outcomes in mind

■ This outcome IS evaluated by this assessment

● This outcome MAY BE evaluated, depending on the exact nature of the assessment / issue tackled

ASSESSMENT

Learning outcome	Blog	Group project	Participation	Exam
Articulate the interdisciplinary nature of environmental studies	●	■	●	■
List & explain the main drivers of the environmental crisis	●	●	●	■
Describe the environmental impacts of human activities	●	■	●	■
Analyse mindset- & practice-based solutions to the crisis	●	■	●	■
Form informed opinions based on critical evaluation of evidence	■	■	●	
Think critically & creatively about approaches to problems	●	■	●	
Work effectively on your own and in a group	■	■	●	
Show evidence of observation and research skills	■	■	●	
Design a project		■		
Communicate effectively in oral and/or written form	■	■	●	
Critique & receive criticism from your peers	■	■	●	