

ENG 104, Winter 2015: Blogging Assignment and Grading Guidelines

From syllabus: **Course blog 10%:** Throughout the term, you will contribute posts to our course blog website (four significant posts, at least 500 words each, over the course of the term), as well as respond to your classmates' posts. The course blog will be a place for us to test out ideas, engage in discussion with each other outside of class, and share texts and materials not included on the course syllabus.

See course schedule for blog post and comment due dates. It is your responsibility to keep up with reading and commenting on the blog regularly. I encourage you to post more often than what is required (extra posts don't have to be 500 words). I also encourage that you read and comment on as many blog posts as you can; doing so will help with preparing for exams and for writing papers. Doing so also demonstrates your engagement in the course.

Purpose of blog:

In this course we will be collaborating on a class blog for the purposes of:

- Responding to and reflecting on the course texts as we read and study them in class.
- Connecting what we read and discuss in class to current events, other texts and media, and our own experiences with, and feelings about, climate change.
- Experimenting with ideas for papers, exams, and other assignments and receiving constructive feedback from our peers.

Rules for using blog:

Because the blog is a public forum, we must all agree to the following:

- We will write about material that is related in some way to the course material or class discussions.
- We will not use inappropriate or offensive language.
- When we do offer criticism, it will be constructive.
- We will avoid using chat language.
- We will re-read and edit our posts and comments before submitting them.
- We will not plagiarize and will cite other sources when we draw from them.

Suggestions for effective posting and commenting:

Posts:

- Write with your audience in mind, that is the other members of this class as well as a larger audience of people who are interested in climate change, fiction, and literature and culture generally.
- When appropriate, directly quote from and cite the texts that we are reading in class. This is a great forum for practicing close reading and analyzing particular passages, and this will help you immensely on the exams and papers.
- Pose questions and be open-ended to generate discussion.
- Hyperlink outside sources (if it was online) as well as anything else that adds to your post.

Comments:

- Comments should be at least five sentences in length.
- Respond to others thoughtfully and respectfully.
- When appropriate, show the author of the original post that you hear him/her. “I hear you saying...” / “It seems to me that you are claiming ...”
- Read the whole post before you comment.
- Read the comments posted before yours.
- Use constructive criticism only and don’t use derogatory or inflammatory language.
- Support your comments with evidence from the texts.
- Suggested response prompts: This made me think about... I wonder why... Your writing made me form an opinion about... This post seems relevant because... Your writing made me think that we should... I wish I understood why... This is important because... Another thing to consider is... I can relate to this... I don’t understand... I was reminded that... I found myself wondering...

Grading:

An “A” level blog post will:

- Offer informed connections between course materials and ideas and at least one additional text encountered outside the course. Fully describe and analyze this outside text.
- Engage thoughtfully and originally with one or more of the course texts or discussion topics.
- Display a mastery of close reading skills in engaging with course texts.
- Display a mastery of literary and climate change terminology.
- Include a clear sense of order and organization.
- Include no spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Fulfill the length requirement.

A “B” level blog post will:

- Offer some connection between course materials and ideas and at least one additional text encountered outside the course.
- Engage adequately with at least one of the course texts or discussion topics.
- Display some close reading skills in engaging with course texts.
- Display some knowledge of literary and climate change terminology.
- Include some sense of order and organization.
- Include few spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Fulfill the length requirement.

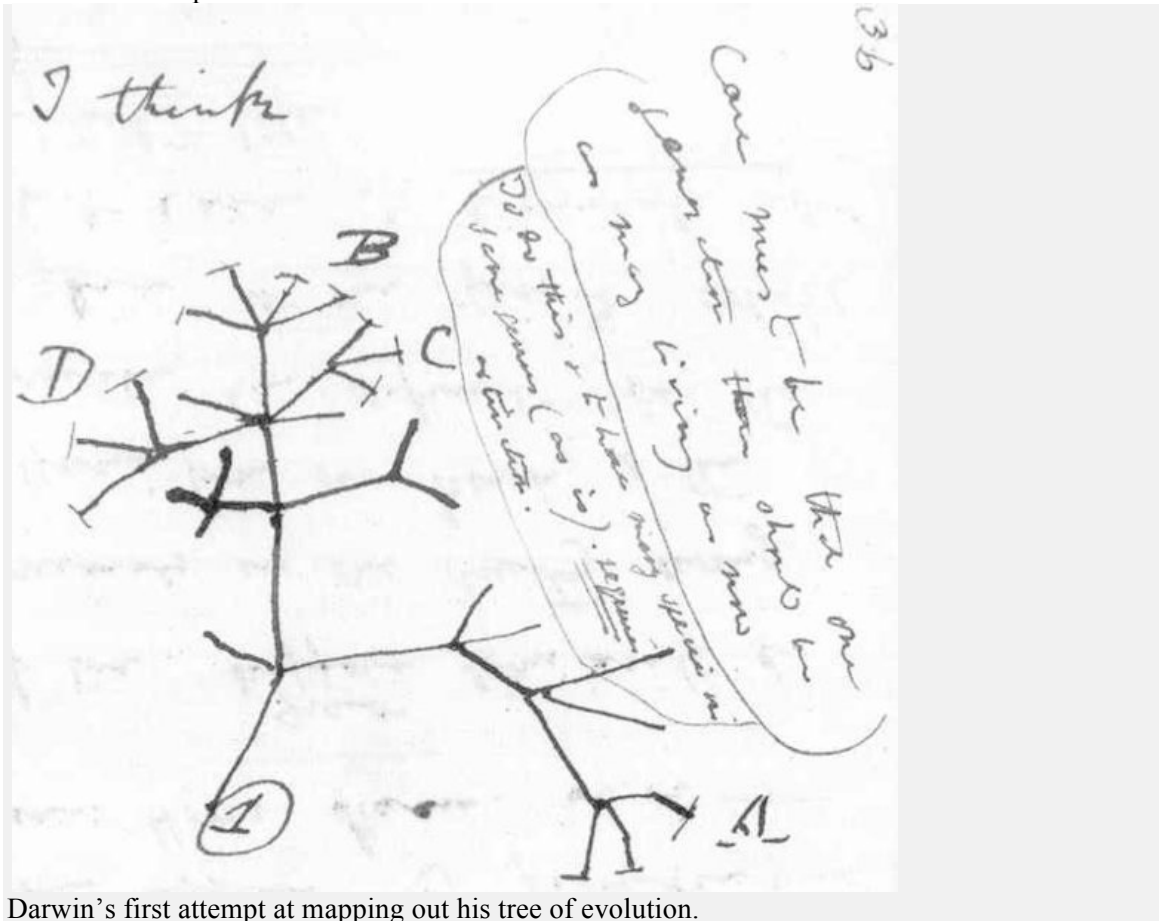
A “C” level blog post will:

- Engage somewhat with at least one of the course texts or discussion topics.
- Make some attempt at close reading and at using literary and climate change terminology.
- Include some spelling and grammar mistakes, but not enough to interfere with meaning.
- Fulfill the length requirement.

Sample “A” level blog post from another course blog:

“Visualizing the Tree: Darwin’s Theory of Natural Selection”

Charles Darwin is considered a pioneer in terms of empirical science. His theory of evolution is widely used today. But, what some people don’t realize is that apart from writing a scientific novel, Darwin also wrote a great piece of literature. He uses several different poetic devices that, at least for me, truly help to develop the ideas of his theory in a way that’s easy for the reader to understand and picture.



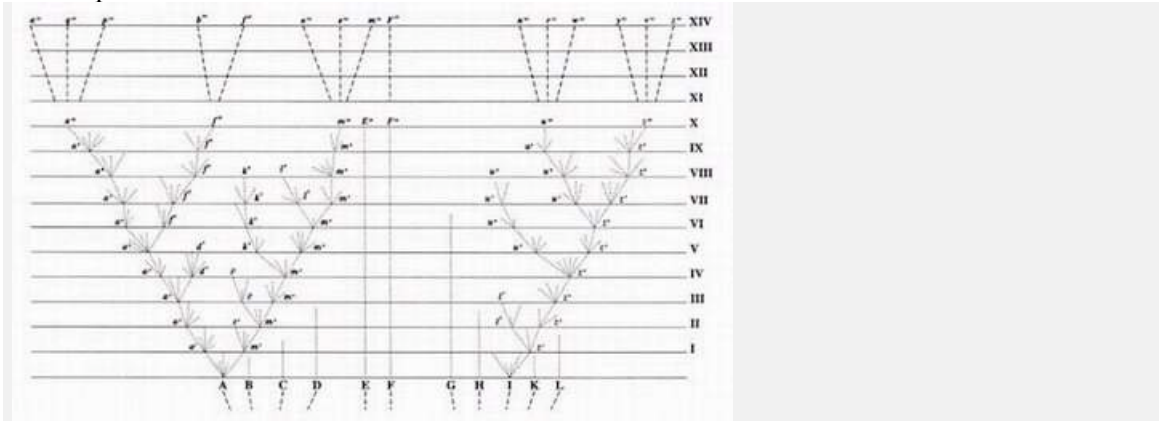
Darwin’s first attempt at mapping out his tree of evolution.

“The affinities of all the beings of the same class have sometimes been represented by a great tree. I believe this simile largely speaks the truth. The green and budding twigs may represent existing species; and those produced during each former year may represent the long succession of extinct species.” (Darwin, On the Origin of species)

When I read this passage, I think, Darwin did a fantastic job at explaining his theory. His overall argument is that species evolve from one another, and that those species with similar traits to others have a less likely chance at survival. He titled this theory Natural Selection and it’s widely used among the fields of environmental studies. As I read this selection, I felt like I could truly visualize what Darwin was thinking. A tree contains both new and old twigs and branches. The most flourishing ones, in this instance, represent the most current species, while the older branches depict the species that have become extinct for any various reasons. Personally, I feel that this is incredible writing, given the nature that Darwin was alive.

I presumably see a very subtle, and clever, tie between the tree analogy and his theory of Natural Selection. A tree is a living multi-cellular organism that must compete for survival amongst the similar living objects of its species. For example, trees that grow very near one another must compete for the direct amount of resources in the vicinity.

It's remarkable to me that Darwin chooses another living object that directly uses his theory, to represent his theory. As an avid reader, I tend to usually like see an analogy that incorporates anthropomorphism; or giving human like characteristics to non-human objects, but this one does a fantastic job at describing his theory. It was extremely clever on his part to analogize an object that uses his theory. It gives me two different perspectives to visualize his interpretation of this natural phenomenon.



After several years, Darwin produced this image, which represents a larger form of his original tree.

There's another example in this same passage where Darwin uses analogy to describe his theory: *"Of all the twigs which flourished when the tree was a mere bush, only two or three, now grown into great branches, yet survive and bear all the other branches; ..."* (Darwin, On the Origin of Species)

It's fascinating to me that Darwin expands on his original metaphor of the tree. He originally stated that the older branches on a tree may represent the extinct species, and now he's stating that there are only a few branches left, proving his theory in that only a few branches (or species) can survive in a given area. By area, I am directly referencing the single tree to which this analogy refers.

This passage shows both ends of his theory. He allows the reader to visualize a tree with many old branches, indicating the extinct species, while also allowing the reader to see the few that survived; which accurately represents the main argument of this chapter, in that nature will naturally "weed out" the species that can't survive, and that those of similar cellular structure will have to compete to see who can be one of "the branches" that make it through to the next year.