

Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Environmental Context of Human History

First writing assignment -- Due Thursday, 6 September 2001

The Third Chimpanzee's opening chapter concerns scientific and ethical aspects of the relationship between humans and other animals, particularly our closest evolutionary relatives, the great apes. For your first writing assignment, I have asked you to ***compose a one-page essay that describes an implication of this chapter's argument for how humans view ourselves.*** Diamond, for example, considers the consequences of accepting the view that humans are a third species of chimpanzee for the ethics of using our close relatives in medical research. Can you think of other aspects of what humans do (and how we *make choices* about what to do) that "the third chimpanzee" perspective would affect?

An "essay" is a piece of writing that presents and develops a single idea (the essay's "thesis"). For example, a music review (a specific kind of essay) might be based on the thesis that, "Despite its title, Radiohead's new CD, Amnesiac, is not at all about memory loss, as the music clearly echoes the band's previous release, Kid A." After stating this thesis, our (hypothetical) critic needs to support that idea with *evidence* and *logical arguments* about the similarities between these two CDs.

How do you prepare to write an essay? For this assignment, refer to the following tips.

1. Select a clear, meaningful thesis, and introduce it in a paragraph that previews the rest of the paper. Ensure (don't *assume*) that the reader knows *what* you are writing about and *why* it is a significant issue. (Your essay probably needs to begin with a brief statement of Jared Diamond's thesis in chapter 1. Otherwise the reader will not know what inspired *your* thesis.)
2. Follow the introductory section with paragraphs (with one main idea each) that present *evidence* and *arguments* supporting the thesis. Convince the reader that your thesis has merit. (In longer essays it also is helpful to *introduce and refute counter-arguments*.)
3. End essay with a paragraph that states the essay's take-home lessons clearly and effectively.

The first assignment asks you to apply these tips with minimum of fuss, in a single page total. Thus, it might be a good idea to compose only three paragraphs, one for each function.

All papers in this class should follow these formatting guidelines.

- Papers should be *typed, double-spaced*, and use a *font no smaller than 10 point*. (I think that 12 point represents the best general size for college papers.)
- Do not use a separate title page. Under the paper title, at the top of the first page, write your name, your campus box number, the class, and the date.
- Use references, if any, according to APA style guidelines. I do not expect you to use references in the first assignment.