

The Duke Ellington School of the Arts
AP Biology Syllabus

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Dear Students and Parents:

Students, I congratulate you on taking on the challenge of AP Biology. It is a demanding course, but the rewards make the effort worthwhile.

The following are some of the most common reasons students take AP courses:

- To have a good chance of receiving advanced standing (or credit) in that subject when they go to college. I have 15 years of experience in teaching AP Biology, and earned the 2002 AP Biology Teaching Award for the Middle States Region (MD to NY). I have every reason to believe that motivated students this year will perform well on the AP Biology exam.
- To receive additional quality points when the grade point is averaged (e.g., a "B" counts 4 points, the same as an "A" in a normal course).
- To receive credit on their transcripts for taking on the challenge of an AP course. Many "name" schools expect AP courses. I should add that AP Biology is known to be one of the most challenging AP courses and may be weighted more heavily by colleges.
- To receive experience in performing college-level work.

Because the course is a college-level course, students should be prepared to work much harder than for a normal course (my AP Biology course goes at roughly four times the pace of my Introductory Biology course). Approximately 5-8 hours of homework per week should be expected.

The AP Biology Syllabus from the College Board is attached. It gives the topics covered, the lab requirements and the percent of the AP biology exam which tests a given topic. Students should keep this for future reference.

The course is designed to prepare students to take the AP biology exam Monday, May 14, 2012. Soon after that an old AP exam will be given as the final exam. Because an actual AP exam is used as the final exam (AP exams are designed to be predictive of performance on other AP exams), I ask that students agree not to study old AP exams without my permission. Students will be taking old AP exams as practice tests as part of the preparation.

Also, students are strongly encouraged to take the SAT 2 on either May 5 or June 2, 2012. My course is designed for students to do better on the M (molecular) version than the E (ecology) version of the SAT 2, but this is a student option (students choose version M or E when they take the test).

Because AP Biology is a warm-up course for college, considerable responsibility and choice is given to the student. The following is the homework system I have used in the past: Choose your own combination of 30 facts (usually vocabulary words), chapter outlines, study guide questions, or chapter-end questions. You can also draw figures to aid understanding (student indicates "fact equivalent" depending on figure complexity). The key is to focus on important information (avoid obviously strange jargon words that you will never remember anyway). *Think* as you write: mechanically copying will not help you – interacting with information will. Seniors are permitted to slump only *after* the AP exam (and even then they have to *show up* and not protest their cruel fate at actually having to go to school)!

Classes that work as a team get better AP scores—just let me be the coach. Remember that this is a *survey* course, not a *seminar* course based on class discussions (it prepares you for college seminar courses). Some students find this frustrating, but we are focusing on the goal: the highest possible score on the AP exam. In late May and June, we will relax the pace, dissect various animals and organs, do one of the time-consuming, non-critical AP labs and enjoy student presentations. However,

all students must attend every day through the official last day for their grade level. Do not schedule early vacations.

Materials

- Text: Biology, by Campbell, Reece and Mitchell, 1999. Pack, Cliff Notes AP Biology, 2007.
- 3-ring binder notebook with paper.
- pen
- pencil
- basic calculator (needed at all labs). Please do NOT risk losing an expensive calculator.

The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd advisory grades will be calculated as follows:

- 35% tests
- 30% assignments
- 15% participation
- 15% quizzes
- 5% notebook

In the 4th advisory, a term paper and oral presentation (on any approved biological topic of the student's choice) will be required and will count 10% of the advisory grade (with assignments reduced to 20%). The final grade is determined as follows: 20% Final Exam, 80% average of advisory grades.

The standard grading scale is:

- A 100-93
- A- 92-90
- B+ 89-87
- B 86-83
- B- 82-80
- C+ 79-77
- C 76-73
- C- 72-70
- D+ 69-67
- D 66-64
- F 63 and below

Notebook

The notebook must be a 3-ring binder with 3-ring notebook paper. Spiral notebooks are NOT acceptable because they do not provide an organized place for handouts and returned assignments. The order of material in the notebook is:

1. Biology Assignment and Grade Summary (the student and parent can instantly tell if the student is doing their assignments and their test and quiz scores)
2. List of instructions for assignments (an organized planner can substitute).
3. Handouts
4. Returned assignments.

Participation

The most important part of participation is attendance. Tardy or absent students are responsible for getting assignments from classmates. 2 points are deducted from the participation grade for every 3 tardies, 2 points for every unexcused absence. Parents: please give students 2 brief notes for tardiness or absence: one for the main office and one for teachers. Tardiness or absence will not be excused without a note. Students can make up as many as 5 tardies by doing an extra assignment for each tardy prior to the next class meeting. Students should see me after class or during lunch to arrange the assignment.

Participation will be monitored daily. The basic grade for students who are not disruptive is an 85. This grade goes up if students are actively engaged and down if students are not on task. Students will be assigned seats and the participation grade will be low if this policy is violated.

Quizzes and Tests

Quizzes will be given on each topic covered in class. The lowest quiz score will be dropped. Tests will be given on every unit, typically 2 or 3 per advisory. Make-up quizzes and tests must be taken by appointment during lunch within 2 class meetings of returning from the excused absence.

Assignments

Assignments will be made every day. The grade for complete, on-time assignments is 100. The grade for incomplete or late assignments is 70, although late assignments cannot be handed in after the test on that unit. On-time assignments will be entered into Engrade within a week. Late assignments take longer.

Classroom Rules and Expectations

1. Students must be respectful of themselves, their peers and the teacher.
2. Students must be on time and are expected to come to class quietly and be prepared to work. Students should take care of all personal needs before coming to class. Hall passes will not be given for the first 15 minutes of class.
3. Students must not eat, drink or chew gum while in class.
4. Electronics must be kept out of sight at all times. Visible electronics are subject to confiscation (to be returned later). Repeated offenses will be referred to the Dean of Students.
5. Hats/do-rags are not permitted in the school building.

I am confident that students will support each other's education by following the above rules. I should mention that I very much enjoy the positive spirit at Ellington and I love to see and hear students show their talents. We will be singing biology songs and raps in class that I have written and recorded, and students are encouraged to write their own. Some of them may even be recorded (2 songs from my second commercial CD were written by former AP students). Students, please let me know when you perform or display your work—I will do my best to attend. Parents, I cordially invite you to my class.

I look forward to a great year of learning biology (I'm still learning too!) and getting to know all of you better. If you don't like something about the course, clearly identify the problem, try to think of a suggestion for improvement and TELL ME, preferably privately so that we can discuss it. Student comments make a big difference—I fine-tune the course every year, incorporating student suggestions.

Remember, you will get out of the course what you put into it, so give it your best shot!

Sincerely,

Arthur W. Siebens, Ph.D.

Please fill in the form below and have your child return it. Please keep the rest of the syllabus for reference. Thank you.

Teacher's Signature _____ Date _____

Student's Signature _____ Date _____

Student cell phone _____ email _____ (Students often leave things in my room—this allows me to contact them before they leave school.)

Parent/Guardian Name (Print) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian Contact Info: home phone _____ cell/work phone _____
email _____

Second Parent/Guardian Info if applicable home phone _____ cell/work
phone _____ email _____

Back-up/emergency contact person _____ phone _____