

# Biology 1 – General Biology

Fall 2025 (BIOL-1-V9324)

[F25 Tentative Schedule](#)

## Course activities (assignments)

The following activities are set up to help you learn the course content and become more comfortable talking (and thinking) about biology. Your grade in the class is heavily weighted on exams. The other activities are designed to help you learn the content you'll need for the exams.

### Lectures (≈ 5% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for completion

Course content is delivered through video lectures found in discussion forums. (If the video lectures are difficult for you, you can also acquire course content by reading the textbook.) To complete these lecture assignments, you have two tasks.

#### First: Watch the lecture and take notes

Watch the video lecture and take notes in your External Brain. (You can also find the lectures on YouTube, but I encourage you to watch them in Canvas, because then you don't have to watch ads.) Treat the video just like an in-person lecture. Your ability to take good notes is critical for your success in this course.

#### Next: Participate (meaningfully) in the discussion

The goal here is to engage with the course content *and your classmates* in a way that is meaningful for your learning. There are no required post numbers or word counts. The only requirement is meaningful participation. Some ways you might participate are:

- **Share something muddy or fun.** This can include something you were confused about from the lecture, or something you thought was particularly cool.
- **Post extra-value resources** like videos with explanations, images or links with descriptions, practice exam questions, vocabulary lists, or excerpts from your External Brain.
- **Share metacognitive insights** describing your thinking about the content and how your understanding may have changed (or deepened) as you engaged with the process.
- **Make authentic connections with classmates** and help build our learning community. If you find something helpful, say so. That will help guide the quality of the forum.
- **Ask questions** about the things that confused you.

I highly encourage you to visit and participate in the discussion a couple times. Because we're running an asynchronous class, the discussion forum will change over time. Come back and see what else you can learn.

### Quizzes (≈ 5% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for correctness

Administered through Canvas, these short quizzes (one per lecture) will cover the week's material. You can take them as many times as you want and Canvas will record your high score. Quizzes mimic the format of the exams in this class. Each quiz will cover one topic, so you can practice that topic as much

as you want. Most quizzes are 5 questions long, timed (about 1 min/question), and they pull from a bank of questions, so each time you take the quiz, you'll get a different set of questions on the topic. You are not shown the correct answer on the quizzes, but I encourage you to discuss them with your classmates, especially if you find something tricky. You are welcome to continue taking quizzes as many times as you want for practice, even after the "best by" date.

## Labs (≈ 5% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for completion

**Labs are a required part of this course.** If you do not earn 70% of the lab points, you cannot pass the class.

Each week, there will be one lab assignment to complete. Each lab will include multiple tasks, as well as a discussion forum (to facilitate teamwork). Lab tasks include some combination of the following types of activities.

- **Kitchen** activities require you to gather household materials (or maybe even groceries) and carry out experiments. Labs always have a materials list, so you know what kind of resources you need to acquire. Because of this, it is a good idea to read through the lab assignments before they are due.
- **Digital** activities are facilitated by online tools and simulations.
- **Worksheet** activities ask you to answer questions and solve problems delivered in a worksheet format. You can print the worksheet and do it by hand, or you can do it digitally.
- **Cut-n-paste** activities require you to print something, cut it up, and paste it onto a new paper. Some people have digital skills that allow them to do these labs without paper, scissors, and glue. That's cool too.
- **Outside** activities are assignments that ask you to carry out various tasks outside, which is fun.

To turn in your lab, you must create one document that includes evidence of your learning. Each lab assignment includes clear instructions about what must be submitted. The ability to take screenshots of computer activities might be helpful. You can also print your work, and submit pictures of your printed work. Please submit one document that includes all the required lab work.

Labs will be graded on completeness, which means the actual thing you turn in is less important than the learning you do. I highly encourage doing the lab work in groups. And please know-- each lab is designed to take about 3 hours to complete. If they are taking you much less, consider it an opportunity to study the material. If they are taking you much longer, let's talk.

## Applications (≈ 5% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for completion

This is a sort of "choose your own adventure" assignment and is an opportunity to dig deeper into course content, and learn about something beyond our course material itself. The goal of this assignment is that you apply your knowledge to something new. You could do a case study, write a summary of a research article, read a book, or explain a complex new topic.

There is a TON of freedom with this assignment, which isn't always a good thing. There are four application assignments throughout the semester and they are due at the same time as your exams. You get one point for the product that demonstrates your understanding, and one point for reflecting on your learning.

## Check-ins (≈ 5% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for completion

Four times over the semester, you will have the chance to do some sort of check-in with me. This is just an easy way for us to stay connected, which is a really important ingredient that helps me support your success in this class. There are 3 ways to complete your check-in assignments:

- Record a simple (and very BRIEF- 2 minutes or less) video in Canvas. I love this option because I get to see YOUR face and hear your voice, and I feel like I know you better after that. It doesn't facilitate very good back-and-forth conversations, though.
- Connect with me in Pronto, our super amazing (and easy) chat tool. I love this option because it is really easy to spend some time chatting. We can even do an impromptu video chat in Pronto.
- Schedule a phone call or Zoom video chat, so we can have a more in-depth discussion.

## External Brain ( $\approx$ 5% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for completion

Over the course of the semester, you will create your own unique resource referred to as your "External Brain (EB)." This is basically just a compilation of any notes you take while learning. You want your External Brain to be in a format that is optimally useful and accessible to YOU. **You will be able to use your External Brain on all exams.**

Your External Brain should contain your original work, although of course you are welcome to share ideas and discuss concepts with your classmates. Your External Brain will be assessed for completion (not accuracy). You have an interest in accuracy, though, because you can use your EB on your exams.

### External Brain Rules

1. All content in your EB must be your own work.
2. You may include UNLABELED images in your External Brain, even if you do not draw them yourself. (You can white-out the labels on the images if you want.) You are welcome to LABEL any images by hand. It is wise to cite the image source if you do this.
3. Please do NOT include MY typed lecture notes or text chapters in your External Brain. However, you CAN include all your own stuff (and you are welcome to copy any material into your EB. Again, it is wise to cite the source.)
4. It is often ok to include lab handouts in your EB. Refer to the EB assignments in Canvas for a list of other course materials you can include if you want.

## Exams ( $\approx$ 70% of total grade)

Scoring: Credit for correctness

Your future likely has exams in it. In a high-content biology course like this one, it therefore makes sense to practice taking exams. Please try to approach these exams as opportunities to improve your skills. I am delighted to focus on improvements rather than scores when it comes to exams in this class.

### Midterm Exams (4)

There will be four midterm exams throughout the semester that cover material from both lecture and lab. There will also be an optional comprehensive final exam that can replace any lower midterm scores. Exams mimics the format of the quizzes and consists entirely of questions that can be automatically graded (mostly multiple choice). You have two attempts at each exam, and Canvas will record your high score. All questions are pulled from question banks, so each attempt will present a unique set of questions.

You may use your External Brain on all exams. I do this because I don't need you to memorize every little detail, though I do need you to be familiar enough with the material to be able to look it up and

find it in your notes. Because the exams are also timed, you will still want to study and prepare for them. Before each exam, you will also agree to this honor code:

### Honor Code for Exams

- I promise that the work I do on this exam is my own.
- I am allowed to use the resources I've created and collected in my External Brain.
- I will NOT consult with any other humans when completing this exam.
- I will NOT use the internet to search for information or answers.
- I will NOT use my textbook to search for information or answers.
- I will NOT consult any AI tool for help.

This honor code is designed to ensure the integrity of the exam process, which is an important part of helping support your deep learning and skill building in this class. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns about this.

### Final Exam (Optional)

You will have the option of taking a comprehensive final exam. This exam will not count toward your grade directly, but if you take it, you can use it to replace any lower midterm scores. If your final exam grade is lower than your midterm grades, it will not impact your final grade at all. You don't have to decide about this until finals week.

## Assigning grades

Oh my. Where to begin with this one?

The purpose of grading is to somehow quantify how well you are mastering the material in this course. Grades can help you pinpoint troublesome topics that might impact your understanding of future content (in this course or even in future programs). And your "grade" in this class matters, because it can determine whether or not you get into the programs you are aiming for. However, grades can be tricky and I've spent a lot of time reflecting on this.

I've moved toward **weird grading**. It probably won't feel that new at first, but we will focus on learning and improvements...and not the number that represents any kind of judgment of you.

I know this is vague, and the only thing I can assure you of with absolute confidence is that this move is GOOD FOR YOU and it is GOOD FOR YOUR LEARNING.

With the caveat that we'll be doing things a little differently this semester, in the end I must submit a final grade for each of you. I am including the approximate % scale I've used in the past to determine letter grades in my classes.

100.0 – 93.00% = A	89.99 – 87.00% = B+	79.99 – 77.00% = C+	69.99 – 60.00% = D
92.99 – 90.00% = A-	86.99 – 83.00% = B	76.99 – 70.00% = C	< 59.99% = F
	82.99 – 80.00% = B-		

Canvas will report a grade for you. This is the lowest grade you can earn in the class. At the end of the semester, I will look at all the scores in our class and may adjust these ranges a little.