Bio 1M: Course introduction

1 Introduction — Chapter 1

1.1 Ground rules

Expectations of professor

- Start and end on time
- Focus on conceptual understanding
- Make clear what terminology and facts must be learned
- Open to questions – both in class (within reason) and at office hours
- Available by email and on Facebook
  - I am not your friend
  - At least, not on Facebook

Expectations of students

- Start and end on time
- Print the notes from the web and bring them to class
- Don't talk while other students are talking, or while I am responding to student questions
- If you must talk at other times, be inobtrusive
- Don't use your computer in class
- If you must use your computer in class, be inobtrusive
  - And don't connect to the internet

Structure of presentation

- Required material will be clearly outlined in the notes
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- Required terminology will be presented in **bold**
- General ideas and approaches presented in class may also be required; you should take notes on these in your own words

Why come to class?

- It's required
- Listening and thinking and talking will help you understand concepts, instead of just memorizing
- Details and terminology should be covered in sufficient detail in the notes; concepts may not be

Why read the book?

- It's interesting
- The book will explain some things in a better way (for you personally) than I do
- Familiarity improves understanding

Taking notes

- You will need to develop your own style of taking notes
  - Many people benefit from writing things down, or using their own words
- If a new concept is making sense to you right now, write something that will help you remember
- If there's something I think you all need to write down, I will write it for you (or mark it as an answer)

Evaluation

- You are not responsible for details unless they are in the notes
  - and not responsible for terminology unless it's in **bold**
- You *are* responsible for relevant ideas and concepts from lectures and readings
- Conceptual questions, logical inference questions and application questions are fair game
  - Practice questions will be available

2 Thinking conceptually

Deductive thinking

- Science proceeds by advancing hypotheses and comparing them to facts
- Facts can be observed from nature, or we can construct experiments to test specific hypotheses
- Basic, logical thinking is very *simple,* but it is often not *easy* for humans to think clearly about abstract concepts

2.1 Example: cards and drinks

Deductive thinking

- You are the manager of a restaurant
- You can see some people's drinks clearly, and tell whether the drinks are alcoholic or not (but not the people's ages)
- You can see other people's faces clearly, and tell whether they are underage or legal-age (but not what they are drinking)
- You want to test the hypothesis that everything is OK:
  - everybody who is drinking alcohol is of legal age
- Which of the four groups of people do you need to check out?
  -

Deductive thinking

- You go to a job interview, and are shown some playing cards.
- Some cards are face up, and you can see that they are aces or kings.
- Some cards are face down, and you can see whether they have bicycles or airplanes on the back
- The interviewer asks you to test the hypothesis that all of the aces have airplanes on the back
- Which of the four groups of cards do you need to turn over?
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Thinking conceptually

- Logical interpretation and inference is simple, but not always easy
  - This is true for everyone
- Being on familiar ground helps us think clearly
  - This will work for different people in different ways: learning facts, stories, mechanisms, etc.
- Practice clear thinking about simple questions

2.2 Logical inference

Inference

- Does the last statement *follow* from the first two?
- Cats have four legs. Mammals have four legs. *Therefore*, cats are mammals
  -
- Cows can fly. Dushoff is a cow. *Therefore*, Dushoff can fly.
  -

Why are simple things difficult?

- Probably because we've evolved to be good at certain kinds of thinking
- Example: training pigeons
  - Pigeons can be trained to do remarkably complicated things with their bills to get food
  - and with their feet to avoid electric shocks
  - but not the other way around!
- Why does this make sense?

Assignment: Logical equivalence

- Are these two statements logically equivalent?
  - Tall people are mean
  - Mean people are tall
- Are these two statements logically equivalent?
  - Good food is not cheap
  - Cheap food is not good

Logical equivalence

- Statements are **logically equivalent** if they express the same fact in different words. In other words, if either one is true, the other one must be true.
- Different people find it useful to think about logical equivalence in different ways
  - Can you construct an example where one is true and the other is false?
  - What would it take for each statement to be true?
  - What would it take to falsify each statement?

3 The cell theory — (pp. 2–3)

All living organisms are composed of cells

- A **cell** is a highly organized compartment bounded by a membrane
- **Genes** made of **DNA**
- **Proteins** made of **amino acids**
- What about viruses?

Where do cells come from?

- Are they generated spontaneously?
  - If we leave damp bread out, molds just appear
- Do they come only from other cells?
  - Then where did the first cells come from?

The Pasteur experiment

- Fig 1.2
- Why was it necessary to have two flasks?
- What if the first flask had also failed to grow cells?
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- Does this prove all cells come from cells?
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4 Doing biology — (pp. 9–13)

Hypotheses

- We pursue science by evaluating **hypotheses** (sing., hypothesis). These are proposed explanations of facts.
- We use hypotheses to make predictions, and use experiments and observations to attempt to **falsify** hypotheses – to prove they are false.
  - Most hypotheses cannot be *proved* to be true, instead, if we fail to falsify them, we say that they are supported
  - If a hypothesis explains many facts, and survives attempts at falsification, we tend to believe it

4.1 Observational studies

- Look for ways to collect data that will support or challenge hypotheses
- Scientists are cautious about making conclusions from observational studies
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Example: Why are giraffes so tall?

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Fig 1.8

4.2 Experiments

Example: How do ants navigate through landscapes?

- Many species of ants move efficiently through landscapes while finding food and returning to their nests
- How do ants navigate through landscapes?
- Fig 1.9

Interpretation

- What would you think if the modified ants didn't navigate normally this time?
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- Why do we test the normal ants *again*?
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- What should we conclude?
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Example: Vitamin C

- I want to find out whether Vitamin C is good for mice, so I raise a mouse on a standard diet, with Vitamin C supplement, to see whether it has a long, happy, healthy life.
- What is wrong with this experiment?
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Control

- Good experiments are **controlled**: we have two or more groups that differ only in some factor we want to study
  – flask neck, vitamin C
- Groups should be as similar as possible, except for the factor that we wish to study

Replication

- Good experiments are **replicated**: each group has more than one **replicate**
  – A replicate is a unit which is subjected to a chosen treatment mouse, a troop of baboons, a flask
- Replicates in the same group should not have anything in common (except for the factor we are studying)
  – Replicates often planned first, then assigned randomly to groups
- What if we put all the mice that get vitamin supplements in one cage, and the others in another cage?
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Assignment: Car Trouble

- A brother calls his sister because something is wrong with his car
- She arrives, and they have this conversation:
  - Sister: I have a tow hitch, and a tow rope, but I obviously can't tow you.
  - Brother: That's OK, I can tow *you*!
  - Sister: I guess so. If we're careful.
- Each person drives their own car. Nothing is wrong with the sister's car. What is wrong with the brother's car?