Instead of a traditional research paper, you will be writing and researching an informational “fact sheet.” Fact sheets (whether printed or online) are a common type of writing used in public relations and marketing, and are often written by agencies that communicate science to the public. This document provides an in-depth description of this assignment: the assigned topic, formatting guidelines and grading criteria.

Assignment Goals

The purpose of the writing assignment is to measure your core communication and critical thinking skills dictated by the IUPUI Principles of Undergraduate Learning. The fact sheet project has the following goals, which are also used as a basis for grading your assignment. The fact sheet should:

- Make efficient use of library and online information resources and technology and demonstrate the ability to assess the quality, source, and validity of research materials.
- Express ideas and facts to others effectively and accurately in a fact sheet format.
- Comprehend, interpret, and analyze research resources in light of the environmental topic being studied and evaluate the logic, validity, and relevance of research materials to an assigned research topic.
- Synthesize research to arrive at reasoned conclusions or to demonstrate comprehension of a problem.
- Analyze and understand the interconnectedness between a research topic and other related environmental issues or consequences.

What is a Fact Sheet?

Don’t be misled by the term “fact sheet”. This is not a list of factoids, but a hybrid between a traditional research paper and a newspaper or newsletter format. Fact sheets typically include graphics, headlines, pictures, graphs, tables, and pull out boxes to emphasize certain points among the text. All fact sheets have a cohesive styling that pulls together information into one interesting and informative document. Check out the following websites for quality examples of fact sheets.

- NOAA OCRM Publications ([http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/resources/publications.html#2](http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/resources/publications.html#2))
- USGS Fact Sheets ([http://www.usgs.gov/pubprod/pubs.html#factsheets](http://www.usgs.gov/pubprod/pubs.html#factsheets)).
- Examples of fact sheets written by students in past semesters will be made available to you within Oncourse.

Where to Start in Creating a Fact Sheet

Start by writing the text of your fact sheet, then work to integrate tables, imagery, and headings. Utilize the resources offered by Microsoft for editing documents at these links:

Researched Fact Sheet on an Oceanic Issue

Guidelines

This and the following pages will describe the specific topic, formatting guidelines of the fact sheet you will submit. You should read this document completely before writing and submitting your final fact sheet.

Assigned Broad Fact Sheet Topic

An article printed in February 2008 in Science reports 40% of our oceans are heavily impacted by human influences and very few ocean areas remain untouched by human activity. Daily news reports emerge upon an astounding number of issues facing our oceans: overfishing, coastal development, pollution, invasive species, and much more. Scientists, governmental agencies, and interest groups are hard at work finding ways to solve, or at least lessen, these problems that threaten to damage natural oceanic ecosystems and sustainability is at the forefront of many of these efforts.

For this researched fact sheet, you will provide an in-depth look at one of the many environmental problems facing our oceans. Although you are free to choose your own specific topic within this assigned topic (see the exceptions below), your fact sheet should contain, at the minimum:

- A complete discussion and analysis of the problem. Consider the 5 w’s: who, what, when, where and why?
- A discussion and analysis of the relationship of the issue to ideas of sustainability as discussed in your text.
- The science behind the issue including a discussion of how scientists are involved in this issue.
- A look at what effort is currently being made to mitigate the problem and who is involved in these efforts.
- A look towards the future – what is the outlook for this particular issue?
- Well-captioned and discussed graphs, tables or images that exemplify the issue where appropriate.

You are given the freedom and creativity to shape your fact sheet based on the overall topic and the specific formatting guidelines for this fact sheet (see page 3 of this document).

Where to Start in Choosing a Narrowed-Down Topic

The links below will take you to web pages that list topics and specific concerns you might be interested in investigating for this research assignment. Your research will need to go well beyond the information here (simply repeating what is on these websites will not earn you a good grade). These sources may or may not be quality resources as defined in your “Library Resources” module. Refer to that module before using any of these as references for your fact sheet.

The following links contain listings of environmental issues or news articles of issues currently facing the oceans:

- EPA “Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds” - [http://www.epa.gov/owow/](http://www.epa.gov/owow/)

You will be expected to provide an in-depth, well-researched fact sheet on one environmental issue – you will have to do a bit of pre-work to narrow down a good topic. You MAY NOT choose a hot media topic (global warming, oil spills, polar bear extinction, etc) unless you are providing a fresh, in-depth look at the issue that has not been covered extensively. You must narrow down the topic to something manageable in a 5- to 6-page document while maintaining a quality depth-of-research. Keep in mind there are many biased, misleading and inaccurate reports on these topics - it is your responsibility to choose and integrate quality resources into your fact sheet.

Format Guidelines

Your fact sheet should have a clear and arguable thesis statement that is supported by your research, discussions and analysis of your topic. See the “Library Resources” module for more information on designing a solid thesis for written fact sheets. Your fact sheet should have a cohesive styling that pulls together information into one interesting and informative document that keeps your reader interested from start to finish. The following guidelines are given for this fact sheet assignment:

- **You must deliver the final document as a PDF or as a Microsoft Word document.** Do not use an alternative software program (Microsoft Works, Microsoft Publisher, Adobe InDesign, Quark Xpress, etc.) unless you know how to make it into a PDF. The final output must be a page size of 8.5 x 11 inches.

- **The document must be five (5) to six (6) pages in length** - no more, no less - of 8.5 x 11 inch size. Imagine the document being printed like a newsletter-style format fact sheet. Each page should stand on its own, without graphics or text bleeding across two pages.

- **References should fit cleanly within the required page count.** If you choose to have a works cited page (rather than footnotes), it should not look like an “add-on” – it should flow with the formatting of the fact sheet.

- **Keep in mind basic rules of visual design.** Stick with a few fonts and a few colors; the fact sheet should not look like a flyer for the circus. Microsoft Word allows you to add text boxes, wrap objects around each other, use columns, and add visual elements through the drawing tools. Use tabs, paragraph spacing, section breaks, and line spacing as another tool to separate information. Avoid large amounts of blank space.

- **Your fact sheet should not look like a standard research paper.** You can organize your fact sheet into different “articles” that focus on specific issues, or write one large story. Fact sheets typically include graphics, headlines, pictures, graphs, tables, and pull out boxes to emphasize certain points among the text. See page 1 of this document for examples of quality fact sheets.

- **You may choose your own font sizes, margins, and line spacing etc.** However, choosing large fonts and spacing (or tiny fonts and spacing) will reduce your grade. Be careful with double spacing as you won’t have enough room to fully address your topic.

- **There are no guidelines on the number of resources to use/cite.** You are judged on the quality of the resources and whether it’s apparent you integrated them throughout the fact sheet. You easily could review 30 resources, and narrow this down to a subset that you will use in your fact sheet. Using a separate reference for each paragraph or text box may result in a significant reduction in points – integrate your resources fully to demonstrate critical analysis.

- **You should use several different types of resources (internet, books, periodicals, scientific and government documents, etc).** Using all internet sources (or conversely, all book sources) may result in a deduction of points as it demonstrates that you did not go beyond the basic methods of research. Consider integrating a variety of sources, from basic to advanced, to present your topic completely.

Please read the next pages for information on citing resources and grading criteria for this fact sheet assignment.
Library Resources and Conducting Research

This fact sheet assignment will require both physical library research and research through databases and online resources. You must choose quality primary resources in completing your researched fact sheet. If you fail to use quality resources, your grade will be penalized.

Your goal is to choose resources that are NOT someone else’s summary of the same problem, someone’s opinion, or information that is too technical, too general, or totally unrelated to the problem. The most common bad resources students use:

- **Introductory (100/200 level) textbooks.** You are expected to critically evaluate primary resources on your topic—so general information in a textbook is not acceptable.
- **Encyclopedias, Online Dictionaries, Wikipedia, or any other resource that merely summarizes information.**
- **Content from any online or other courses taught here or any other university, or any content posted by a professor that is not directly tied to their research (photos being an exception).**
- **Content that is geographically or culturally unrelated** (if the problem is centered on Indiana, only use web resources from Australia, UK, etc. if you are attempting to compare two countries).
- **Resources that are too technical,** often from scientific research journals. While journals are primary resources, you should stay away from materials that were written for advanced scientists or those you do not understand.

Once you have identified your topic (narrowed down from the assigned topic) begin your research by reviewing and completing the steps presented in the “Library Resources” module. This module will help you identify and use quality primary resources and contains links to many good databases for your research for this fact sheet.

Utilize the IUPUI University Writing Center

If you have trouble writing or would like someone to review a draft of your fact sheet, you should contact the University Writing Center (http://www.iupui.edu/~writectr/) well in advance of the deadline and make an appointment to work with a tutor. Useful documentation from the UWC can be found in the “Library Resources” module for your course.

References and Citations

References must be included as in-text citations or footnotes and formatted consistently in the format of your choice. The library resources module in this course will include more information on citations. Internet resources must be fully referenced. Failure to properly reference internet resources will be penalized.

If you do not have a citation format that you regularly use, please use MLA format. The Library Resources module has links to MLA handbooks and guides Or, you may purchase the MLA Handbook, ask an English teacher if they have a copy you can review, view the book at a library, or go to http://www.mla.org/style/style_faq/style_faq4 to learn more.

Submitting your Fact sheet

You will submit your completed fact sheet as a Word or PDF document to the “Assignments” tool of Oncourse. Your fact sheet will be checked for originality against the databases of Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com will provide you an originality score and report. Turnitin.com compares your fact sheet to many internet resources and other papers submitted to IUPUI. Your instructor may choose to compare your fact sheet to sites beyond those in the Turnitin.com database.
Grading Criteria

The grade you earn will be based on the quality of the fact sheet you turn in. Here are the criteria your fact sheet will be judged against:

- The content indicates you understood the issue—there are no major gaps in the information you presented.
- You picked good resources, and the information presented reflects your knowledge from the resources you cite.
- Your presentation of the information, text, and graphics would help get the general public interested in the topic.
- The content is not too vague, nor too detailed, and you avoided extraneous information.
- You did not use graphics or charts as filler, but to present important information and captioned all properly.
- You provide specific examples through descriptions, data, figures, or tables, as well as a broad overview of the topic.
- You provided a new look at a topic beyond its coverage in the media, your text or your course modules/lectures.
- You provide a balanced, accurate, and up to date description of the issue.
- You avoided overlap with the content of any existing fact sheets or publications or material in this course.
- You organized the information logically (one item leads to another) so you do not repeat yourself.
- You designed the document well. The pictures, graphics, and boxes, etc. make it easy to read and understand.

These criteria will be divided into these three categories:

- **Communication (30%)**
  - Here you are graded on visual appeal, organization of content, cohesive style in writing, lack of wordiness, spelling correctness, audience appeal, and meeting design guidelines. Fact sheets that are visually appealing, grammatically correct, do not contain spelling errors, flow easily and clearly and are formatted according to guidelines will receive full credit for this category. Fact sheets that have little or no visual appeal, have grammar and spelling errors, incorrect formatting or ignorance of fact sheet guidelines will receive lower credit in this category.

- **Content (50%)**
  - This is the most important part of your grade and includes the relevancy and strength of your thesis statement, the accuracy, depth and breadth of information presented in the fact sheet, the relevance of content to current environmental issues, and critical analysis of your issue as related to ideas of sustainability. Fact sheets with a clear, quality thesis statement, evidence of in-depth research, and an appropriate depth of information presented will receive high credit in this category. Fact sheets with weak theses, confusing or inaccurate research, or little evidence of in-depth research will receive lower credit in this category.

- **Sources (20%)**
  - Here you are assessed on the quality of the sources you use, how well these are integrated within your fact sheet, proper citation method, integration of researched material with personal experiences, and depth of research. Fact sheets with accurate and complete in-text and footnote/works cited citations, integration of a variety of sources, properly cited consistently in MLA (or other) format and quality sources will receive full credit in this category. Fact sheets that do not cite resources, are inconsistent in formatting method, not well integrated with resources or poor-quality resources will receive low credit in this category.