

ASTRONOMY 07 -- LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

In My Humble Opinion...

About this Assignment

The “Life in the Universe” class touches upon many topics, many of which may be of personal resonance to you for philosophical, religious, or scientific reasons. I encourage respectful conversations on these issues, and to this end, all students in “Life in the Universe” are encouraged to produce an *Opinion Piece*.

Your Presentation

Opinion Pieces are absolutely not reports on some aspect of class material. (Presenting course content is my job, not yours.) Instead, an *Opinion Piece* is your chance to vent about some speculative topic or point of personal interest. Does your religion or belief system disallow the possibility of extraterrestrial life? Do you believe that there are government conspiracies suppressing contacts with aliens? Are you absolutely sure that life must exist elsewhere in the universe?

Support your *Opinion Piece* with as much evidence as you can, citing appropriate resources. If your source is a religious work, you should cite specific chapters and text; broad, arm-waving but unsupported claims about content are not acceptable. Your task is to be as convincing as possible. You must be presenting upon a topic that you believe in; *Opinion Pieces* are not mere exercises in debate methods.

I do NOT recommend an *Opinion Piece* if you’re just desperate for looking for points near the end of the semester. The spirit of the *Opinion Piece* is to give you an opportunity to vent about something that is bugging you, or that you think needs more attention.

Scheduling *Opinion Pieces*

All *Opinion Pieces* will be presented during the latter portion of the term to the rest of the class. Time slots for these will be allocated on a first come, first serve basis. To reserve your slot, you must give me a written summary (30-50 words long) describing your selected topic. The last day to get an *Opinion Piece* proposal to me is the beginning of the first class session in week 14. Of course, a time slot for your piece must be available.

Oral Presentation

Your presentation must be 4-6 minutes long. You can use PowerPoint if you wish; tell me in advance your presentation format. A few minutes of open discussion will follow, during which you will be responsible for respectfully and effectively defending your position.

Grading

You will receive up to 20 bonus points for your *Opinion Piece*. The score you earn for your *Opinion Piece* grade will not depend upon whether I agree with your opinion. Instead, you will be graded upon the quality and clarity of your presentation, as well as how compelling it may be. Part of your score will depend upon how well you defend your *Opinion Piece* during in-class discussion.