

# Field experience in AP Biology

**Please note: this is a work in progress.** Scroll to bottom for monthly prompts.

*First, inspiring words I first read in [Last Child In the Woods](#):*

Superficially, the world has become small and known. Poor little globe of earth, the tourists trot round you as easily as they trot round the Bois or round Central Park. There is no mystery left, we've been there, we've seen it, we know all about it. We've done the globe and the globe is done.

This is quite true, superficially. On the superficies, horizontally, we've been everywhere and done everything, we know all about it. Yet the more we know, superficially, the less we penetrate, vertically. It's all very well skimming across the surface of the ocean and saying you know all about the sea ...

**As a matter of fact, our great-grand[parents], who never went anywhere, in actuality had more experience of the world than we have, who have seen everything.** When they listened to a lecture with lantern-slides, they really held their breath before the unknown, as they sat at the village school-room. We ... [have incredible experiences and] say to ourselves: "It's very much what you'd expect." We really know it all.

We are mistaken. **The know-it-all state of mind is just the result of being outside the... paper wrapping of civilization. Underneath is everything we don't know and are afraid of knowing.**

~ [D.H. Lawrence](#)

Most children have a bug period, and I never outgrew mine. Hands-on experience at the critical time, not systematic knowledge, is what counts for the making of a naturalist. **Better to be [untutored] for a while, not to know the names or anatomical detail. Better to spend long stretches of time just searching and dreaming.** ~ [E.O. Wilson](#)

Contemporary biological research involves three major ways in which knowledge is generated. The first two, laboratory experimentation and *in silico* work (computer modeling and bioinformatics), are explicitly built into the College Board's AP Biology curriculum. The third is field work: collecting, measuring, or designing experiments that take place in an actual ecosystem. **The field experience component of this course is designed to make sure you leave our class with experience in all three.** [You'll be developing an eye for detail -- and a nose and ear, too -- as well as your skills in recordkeeping, critical reasoning, and questioning.](#)

Here's how it works: you'll select a place in an ecosystem to sit (your "**field site** or [sit spot](#)") and visit that place to sit ten times over the span of nine months outside of class. Each visit will last half an hour to forty-five minutes (but you can stay longer!), and the documentation you'll need to complete for your visit should take an additional hour, tops.

**Documentation is due at 11:59 PM on the due date, but you have the whole assignment window to complete the assignment.** Prompts are linked at the end of this document each month.

**What kind of “field” are we talking about here?** A lot of people think you need to go deep into an unpopulated area to see nature, but I’m hoping you’ll pick something a little closer to home.

- **It should be a place you can get to in ten or fifteen minutes or less by your usual methods of transportation.** Brown County State Park is nice, but it is not appropriate for this assignment. You **HAVE** to have access to it all year, even when you are busy and stressed and the weather is gross.
- **It should be yours and yours alone.** In later assignments, you’ll have the opportunity to invite a companion along. Pick a different spot from your neighbor, sibling, or friend.
- **It should be a relatively safe but private place for you,** and you should be able to bring a phone along and get reliable cell service but **not be interrupted by your family or your dog.** No hiking down a terrific but terrifying gorge, please, and please don’t select your yard if you will not get enough peaceful time there alone.
- **It needs a tree and some plant biodiversity. Your spot must have at least one deciduous tree (with a trunk and with leaves, not needles), at least 12 feet tall, and if it’s a “grassy” place, check to make sure the lawn is actually biodiverse, as we saw in the side lot at school.**
  - The best sit spots are often pretty empty lots, the ditch across the street from your friend’s house, or a place in a city or county park or on the IU campus.
  - “Wilderness,” as a concept, [erases Indigenous people and their vital tending to the land](#), including here in Indiana. In this assignment, any moderately biodiverse land is a fine place to explore.
  - And, listen, I want you to do these assignments. Seriously, your backyard may an *awesome* sit spot for you if it’s got the plant biodiversity describe above. You’ll be surprised how much there is to learn there. But many of you might have more fun in a *very accessible* place that is somewhat less familiar.
- My front yard is my sit spot, and I also sometimes sit here: [a place I walk past on my way to work](#). It’s just a traffic median near Bryan Park where the creek runs through with a willow tree. Nothing fancy. Yes, you can pick a spot on that creek, too.

**What are we going to do there?** Prompts will be linked below as they become available and assigned on Canvas. We’ll do them each month until the end of the calendar year!

- [August](#)
- September
- October
- November
- December

**Hi, teachers! Additional and not-yet-assigned experiences can be found [here](#).**