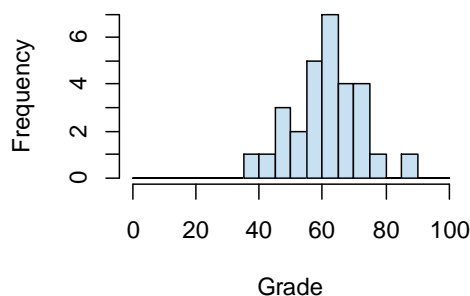


Palaeoecosystems assignment feedback

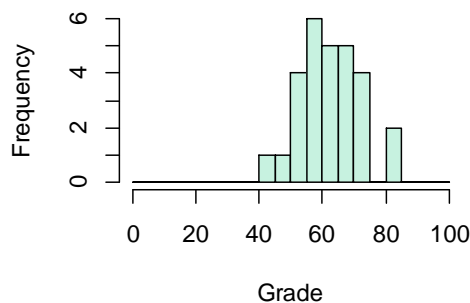
Graded submissions are available for collection from the office. Some frequently encountered issues are identified with a letter code; the corresponding grading remarks are provided below. And as a general point, if you aren't confident on writing style, or want to write more compelling and convincing prose, Strunk and White's classic tome *The Elements of Style* is available from a library near you.

- A. **Off-topic / tangents.** Make sure that everything you write is relevant to the essay topic. Go out of your way to make it clear how tangents illuminate the problem at hand.
- B. **Missing detail.** Statements are made but not backed up or explained. For example, if you claim that "Event X caused B to change", is it clear to the reader (i), why event X might be linked to B; (ii), *how* B changed; (iii), how this change in B can be linked to X, rather than any other factor.
- C. **Missing context.** Make sure that you define or introduce a term the first time you use it.
- D. **Conclusion.** A good conclusion draws together the whole essay to deliver a clear final message. It should synthesise (not merely repeat) what you have already said
- E. **Unsupported statements.** A recurring example: the Wenlock material studied shows no evidence of a reef framework; organisms seem not to be preserved in situ. If claiming that it is a reef, you need to spell out your evidence, evaluating whether claims from the literature necessarily apply to the material that you are examining.

Wenlock assignment



Long essay



- F. **Species nomenclature.** A species name is given as *Genus species*: note the presence/absence of capitals and italics.
- G. **Incomplete figure captions.** Figures should stand alone – it should be possible to interpret and understand them without reference to the text.
- H. **Tables are difficult to interpret.** If numerical values are being presented, then a graph is usually the right way to go. Presenting raw data in a table communicates that you aren't aware what's important about the data. Presenting three different measures of diversity for seven different samples means that the reader has to compare 21 values at once: but the same data could be presented graphically to deliver the same information at a glance.
- I. **Timescale confusion.** Succession occurs on ecological timescales (decades to centuries). Recovery from mass extinction is a fundamentally different process, taking hundreds of thousands of years. And the Silurian period had a number of extinction events of its own – I'd want to see a strong case to attribute any features in the mid-Silurian to the end-Ordovician mass extinction
- J. **The Wenlock is not the only community in the Silurian oceans.** Though the Wenlock was high diversity, it is possible (and indeed true) that other Silurian deposits are much lower diversity. Be careful about how you draw conclusions about all Silurian life from a single deposit.
- K. **Lab notebooks should contain evidence of data collected.** Count data should be collected in tally format or some other means that establishes how data was obtained from the raw material. If someone questioned one of your counts, could you justify yourself from the notebook alone?
- L. **Lab notebooks should contain evidence of data processing.** Even if these are printouts of computer analyses, it should be clear how you obtained the statistics you used to quantify diversity etc.
- M. **Lab notebooks show reflection on significance of observations.** For example, observations of fragmentation might be linked to taphonomic history or used as evidence of transportation