Journal Club

In the Kirby lab, we have a journal club meeting once a month, currently on a Friday at noon. Journal club is quite different than lab meeting. While in lab meeting we focus on us—our data, our scientific journey—in journal club, we focus on closely examining a recently published paper from another lab on a topic relevant to our lab. Below are some guidelines for how this works for both the presenter and the audience. The schedule for journal club is on the lab google calendar.

For the presenter:

Select a paper. The paper should meet the following 4 qualifications:
1. It is on a topic or method relevant to work in the lab. This can be very broadly defined. Your labmates are going to give a minimum of an hour of their life paying attention to this paper. Just try to make it relevant enough to be worth their time.
2. It was published in the last year-ish.
3. It is from a medium to high impact journal. The minimum IF should probably be around where PNAS is. In 2019, that is about 9.4. (See note below on IF).
4. You feel you can understand the paper well enough to present it effectively.

Send the paper to the lab at least 2 to 3 days ahead of time. I don’t expect everyone to read the paper in advance, but it is courteous to give everyone the opportunity to at least skim it and know what the topic is.

Make your presentation. It should include the following elements at minimum:
1. Brief intro of topic/question with some context for why it is important
2. The figures/results of the paper with brief explanation of methods as they come up. Generally speaking, supplemental figures won’t be worth including in the presentation. But you should be familiar with their content in case questions arise during the presentation that are addressed in the supplement. If you feel a particular supplemental figure is key to the paper, feel free to include it in the presentation.
3. If a particularly complex and unfamiliar method is used, explain it to us in detail
4. Notes of any flaws, problems or limitations that stand out to you
5. Summary of the authors’ conclusions and your own (if they differ)
6. Open questions that remain stemming from the paper (can be yours and/or the authors’)

Present the paper to us. Help us all learn what this paper does to advance its field and lead our discussion of its content and implications.

For the audience.

You will get the paper a few days before the presentation. Try to skim it and at least come to the meeting with a vague idea of the topic. If you want to read the whole paper in detail, that’s great. However, it is not required. In my experience, requiring jc paper reading is rarely effective and often not equally useful for everyone. Use your own judgement for whether you want to read the paper yourself. Undergrads, talk to your lab supervisor. Since you are just beginning to use empirical scientific literature, your supervisor may require that you read in advance.

About impact factors. I am using journal IF to broadly define papers that are likely to be high quality and influential. This does not mean that I am endorsing IF as a metric that necessarily reflects how good a
paper is. Plenty of excellent work that has wide reaching influence is published in journals with lower IFs. Individual citation data for each specific paper is probably a better, though still not perfect, metric of influence. But journal club papers are too recent to have accumulated a revealing number of citations. Therefore, until a better metric arises, I am begrudgingly using a minimum journal IF to guide jc paper choices.