COMP80142: Academic Writing and Impact Studies

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School of Computer Science
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About the course
Welcome to the course!
Compulsory for every MRes/MPhil/PhD/CDT student in their first year.
Course leaders

• Jon Shapiro
• Bijan Parsia
Attendance list

- Please sign against your name.
- Or add your name and email address if it does not already appear.
- Attendance is required and assessed.
Goals of the course

To help you achieve your goals, which should include

1. To be able to produce academic writing which people will want to read, and will communicate the message of your research.
2. To be able to assess the writing of others.
3. To clarify your thinking through writing.
Goals of today

- Explain how the course will run
- Start thinking about writing, why do it, and how to do it well.
Tasks you will do

Each of you will:

- Construct a short technical document associated with your research project, demonstrating
  - a style of writing which is clear and understandable to your fellow students;
  - an ability to present a coherent and interesting argument.
- Provide user reviews and feedback on the papers of other students.
- Lead discussions of written pieces.
- Revise your written work taking account of the reviews, and respond to the reviews.
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Your written piece must be associated with your research project!

Possible types of papers:
Research Proposal
Taster project progress report (CDT students)
Draft Workshop paper

It must be your writing!
Because you are at a very early stage of your research, it may contain only some of these elements:

1. What is the problem?
2. Why is this problem important or interesting?
3. What have other people done to address this problem?
4. What is the idea you will use to address this problem?
5. What are some results.
6. What have you learned.

The problem might change later as well. It is just important to get in the habit of writing.
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What it should/could include:

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The written piece (cont)

It should include the usual stuff:

- informative title
- summary/abstract
- introduction
- main part
- conclusions/concluding remarks
- references
Must be comprehensible by everyone in the group.

**Length:** 3–5 pages without references.

We do *not* expect completed work.
Mechanics

1. You have all been assigned to groups:

   Group A . . . Group H

   You will review papers written by other members of your group *only*.

2. We have also assigned each group member a number: 1 – 6.

3. Submit your first draft paper on your group File Exchange in Blackboard (by Feb 16, 2018).

4. Start a new thread in your group Discussion Forum for feedback and discussion.

After this, feedback, discussion and responses can begin.
In-class reviewing

1. There will be three in-class review sessions.
2. At each, two papers are reviewed, two reviewers assigned to lead discussions, and two papers are temporarily “frozen”.
3. When your “Review Copy” is due, that means stop changing it; others can start reviewing it.
4. Other members of the group should also attend to contribute to the discussion.
5. All members of the group should read the two papers being discussed in that session prior to that session.
On-line reviewing

- You can also start reviewing other papers online.
- After your paper is discussed in class, revise it in response to the feedback, and provide responses to that feedback, on Blackboard.
- Submit your final paper as an assessment on Blackboard. **Deadline:** 9 March, 2018.
Deadline reminders

All of you must submit a draft of your paper to Blackboard via your group’s File Exchange

► Deadline: Friday, Feb 16, 2018

All of you must submit your final paper to Blackboard as an Assignment.

► Deadline: Friday, March 9, 2018

We advise that you decide quickly what type of paper you wish to write and on what topic, and start writing.

► Do discuss this with your supervisor.
Resources

COMP80142 Webpage: http://studentnet.cs.manchester.ac.uk/pgr/2017/COMP80142/
  ➤ Schedule
  ➤ Group Assignment
  ➤ Other useful information

Blackboard:
  ➤ For submitting, discussing, reviewing individual papers.
  ➤ General course announcements.
  ➤ Discussion forum.
  ➤ Grades.
Blackboard warning

- There seem to be three! Blackboard versions for this course
- Try to find the right one.

2. *Handbook of Writing for the Mathematical Sciences*, by Nicholas J. Higham. An excellent book, packed with interesting material, but pitched toward mathematical writing. Includes a section on writing for whom English is a foreign language.


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Assessment

- Attendance and active participation in review sessions, discussions of written pieces, and in the seminars.
- Quality of the written work, both the written piece and the reviewing.
- Contributes to your end-of-year information in eProg.
Assignment for Wednesday

- Watch Simon Peyton Jones’ talk on “How to write a great research paper” on youtube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3dkRsTqdDA
- See links on Blackboard under Resources, or Google “how to write a great research paper”.
Why write
Why Write

(Discussion)
Why Write — pragmatic answer

1. If I don’t write a thesis, I won’t get a PhD.
2. If I don’t write lots of papers, I won’t get a lectureship.
3. If I don’t write more papers and successful grant proposals than the head of the promotions committee, I won’t get promoted to full professor.
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2. I need to write to clarify my *own* ideas; to make sure my research is well-conceived and well focused whilst I am carrying it out.
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What makes good writing
Let us now do some writing

All research papers **must** answer the following question at the earliest opportunity.

- What is the problem
- Why is it important
- Why is it unsolved
- What is my contribution to its solution

Write 4 sentences about your research which follows this structure.

When you are finished, exchange it with your neighbour for feedback.
A Golden Rule: When in doubt (about how it is done), go to the literature.

- Read excellent (!) papers.
- How to present ideas, algorithms, mathematics, everything.
- E.g. prize-winning papers or papers acknowledged to be the great papers from your field.
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Finally

Don’t forget: Watch the video for Wednesday.