COMP80142: Academic Writing and Impact Studies

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University of Manchester

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Announcement
Announcement

The students (you) do not seem to be on Blackboard. I have contacted IT services and the e-Learning team.
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 print your name and sign against it.
- 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.
4. To navigate the literature.
5. To be able analyse papers.
Goals of today

- Explain how the course will run.
- Discuss your impressions of the workshop (last week).
- Start thinking about writing, why do it, and how to do it well.
- Discuss ways to address the literature.
Resources

  - Schedule
  - Assignments
  - Other useful information

**Blackboard:** ??? May replace with GitLab
  - For submitting, discussing.
  - General course announcements.
  - Discussion forum.
  - Assessments.
Resources (cont)

List of databases and search tools: A list on the School Wiki compiled by me. Fill free to add anything you find useful.

UoM Library referencing guide: Includes referencing styles and software used at The University of Manchester.

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 participation (a bit)
- Completing the assignments.
- Contributes to your end-of-year information in eProg.
Assignment for Tomorrow

► Read “How to Write a Good Paper in Computer Science” by Andonie, R., and Dzitac, I. (See course website for citation and link.)

► Watch Simon Peyton Jones’ talk on “How to write a great research paper” on youtube, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3dkRsTqdDA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3dkRsTqdDA)

► See links on Blackboard under Resources, or Google “how to write a great research paper”.
Assignment for next Monday — Task A1

- Find out what research is going on in the School and University in your research area
- by collecting relevant papers written by UoM staff.
More specifically

► Assemble a sample of papers related to your PhD topic, at least broadly related.

► The population you are sample is defined to be all papers “relevant to your topic” that have been published by a current member of academic staff at the University of Manchester in the past 10 years plus all completed PhD theses supervised by such staff over the same period.

► You should have 20 papers minimum (and 30 would be better; more better still). Ideally they would be spread over 3-5 venues. If your supervisor is new and your topic unusual in the school, you might have to “stretch” a bit, i.e., loosen your relevance criteria or look outside the school. On the other hand, if your topic is super popular in the school, you may want to tighten things up.
All assignments

Are on the course webpage here.
Discussion of the workshop
What did you think of the workshop?

1. What was really in it?
2. Was it useful?

(Discussion)
Taming the literature
The search for research papers

A search for research papers on a given topic typically yields one of two outcomes:

A desert: No papers found on the given topic!
A mountain: Overwhelmed with a gazillion papers.

4-What to do; how to cope?
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4-What to do; how to cope?
Citation search: find all the papers which cite a given paper.

- Choose a seminal paper, if possible.
- Many tools: Web of Science, Citeseer, Google Scholar, others.
Taming the mountain

- Be efficient. Record all important information.
- Don’t need to re-search for the same document.
- Many tools for recording and annotation your documents exist. See UoM Library referencing guide or the Wikipedia article on “Reference Management Software” for some options.
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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Don’t forget: Watch the video and read the paper for next time.