

Research Methods: Writing Workshop, Week 5

Read through:

1. The lecture notes on writing, Sections 2 and 3
2. “Writing for Computer Science” book, 3rd edition Chapter 7 ‘Style Specifics’ (the book is available electronically through the Springer database, to which the University library subscribes)

Briefly read the following Workshop Paper:

<http://dl.acm.org.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/citation.cfm?doid=2872518.2891115>

Task A: Form groups

Form groups of two or three; ensure that you are working with people who you are *less* familiar with. The session leader may allocate you to groups.

Task B: Improve the Abstract

This abstract has several problems. For example, it can be hard to understand, does little to explain the general problem the paper addresses, and lacks a clear contribution made.

As a group:

- Discuss the shortcomings of the abstract
- Identify at least three key weaknesses in the writing to improve

Individually:

- draft a new version that is both easier for a non-expert to read, and clearer about the research contribution of the paper

As a group:

- Compare your individual drafts
- Find ways to improve each others’ drafts
- Confirm strong points in others’ drafts

There is no need to make your drafts similar – it may be that very different styles work.

Some terminology may help here, from the domain:

- **Recall:** the proportion of all relevant documents (in a collection) that are relevant to a topic, and are found in a search
- **Precision:** the proportion of the topic ranked documents in a search result list that are relevant to the intended topic

Task C: Improve the conclusion

Just as with the abstract, the conclusion would benefit from rewriting, again:

As a group:

- Discuss the shortcomings of the conclusion

Identify at least three key weaknesses in the writing to improve

Individually:

- draft a new version that is both easier for a non-expert to read, and clearer about the research contribution of the paper

As a group:

- Compare your individual drafts
- Find ways to improve each others' drafts
- Confirm strong points in others' drafts

Task D: Introduction

The introduction would benefit from extensive editing – both structurally and at the level of individual sentences.

Individually:

- Edit the first two paragraphs of the introduction. Consider if the use of **bold** text is consistent and helpful to the reader, and if terminology is clearly explained. Is Table 1 presented and used well? What would you change?

As a group:

- Review the introduction as a whole:
 - Identify any repeated statements and unnecessary adjectives – could you shorten this introduction and keep the same ideas?
 - Are there missing ideas that would make the *contribution* of the work clearer?
 - Could the *impact* of a solution being found to the problem being tackled be made clearer?
 - Consider a novice reader, new to the field. How confused would they be? What material would help them understand the paper?