

Black belt

Keeps up with the U.S. NSF / DARPA future project proposals, and the EU / DFG / BMBF calls that follow 1-2 yrs afterwards. Knows what the next hot research fields are going to be, and the topics that will die out soon

Brown belt

Is well-known in the research community, gives invited talks, and is now a member of the "secret" mailing lists. He/She/They is also in the PC of some B+ - A* conferences

Red belt

Has spent a year or two collaborating closely with the PhD students of the top 20 professors, and published a few top papers

Purple belt

Monitors the top 20 professors in the field that supervise most of the papers at the top conferences, sets up Google alert notifications when their publications webpages' are updated

Blue belt

Watches the B+ - A* conferences in the field and its subdomains, and has a map of their usual deadlines, and top publications. Can filter "actual" good papers from "noise", or low-quality research, i.e., reads only the top 20%

Green belt

Has identified a research angle, and a gap where only a handful of early players / research institutes compete, i.e., "knows how to run with the pros"

Orange belt

Maintains own literature classification, and a tailor-made paper collection is in hand. Knows where to look for related work, and is able to critique it. ;-)

Yellow belt

Has read the top 10% of the SoK papers covering the past 5-7 years, and books that have classified the past top papers, set up a widely accepted terminology by the research community, and paved the roadmap for the future.

White belt

Disoriented, lost and overwhelmed with all the papers out there. Switches topics often whenever he/she/they learn something "cool" from a paper that they read