

CMPSC 480
Software Innovation 1
Fall 2019

ASSIGNMENT 1:
Developer Narrative

Point value: 30 pts.
Assigned: 29 August
Due: 5 September

Objective

To create a “first best draft” of your developer narrative.

Goals

- To more completely understand what motivates you as a computer scientist or developer
- To create a statement encompassing your current skills and interests
- To distill the above statement into a concise paragraph which could function as an “About Me” section for a website
- To acquire tools for redeveloping your career narrative as interests or experiences grow or change

What’s a “Developer Narrative”?

Helpful Reading

- Austin Kleon, “Telling Good Stories”

General Idea

A Developer Narrative is a form of Career Narrative, a story which is, essentially, about you. Think of it as the picture that you’d like to leave anyone interested in your work not just employers. Documents like resumes or C.V.s only tell part of your story; the Developer Narrative is your chance to provide some of the reasoning behind your choices, interests, and motivations. While you’ll likely never show this document to anyone, the writing you do here forms the basis for how you present and talk about yourself even so much as to inform design or content choices for your LinkedIn profile or web site.

The Form

- Title ($4 \leq \text{words} \leq 8 \text{ words}$)
 - Think of this as the tl;dr (“too long; didn’t read”) that summarizes the story. Some may find it helpful to leave this until last.
- Opening ($5 \leq \text{words} \leq 15 \text{ words}$)

- First, repeat after me: “I am a computer scientist.”
- Next, write a simple, declarative statement outlining who you are as a developer/computer scientist. Can be as simple as:

“{DEVELOPER, et al.} {INTERESTED IN / RESEARCHING / et al.} {CONCEPT OR RESEARCH AREA}.”

- Specific personal story ($150 \leq \text{words} \leq 250$)
 - Choose a story that highlights how you became interested in either computer science (as a general discipline) or in your specific research interest. Often, it helps to remember a time when you had choice to make that impacted a project significantly and that you remember as a key point in figuring out a concept or understanding who you are as a developer. Some areas to think about during this section:
 - * A concept which you initially struggled to understand, but later mastered
 - * An area which seemed intimidating, but you found comfortable
 - * A concept which you grasped intuitively
 - * A time when a project catastrophically failed and how you persisted beyond failure
 - * A frustration with the discipline that you’re keen to solve
- Transferrable research or skills ($5 \leq \text{items} \leq 15$)
 - What projects or skills have you created/acquired in your career thus far which make you both **unique** and **employable**. These elements, deceptively hard to answer, may include things like (but not limited to):
 - * expertise in individual programming languages/dialects
 - * demonstrated results/work in industry or research topics (including internships)
 - * coursework, or projects
 - * open source or other community participation/development

Ideally, these should come in a planned/organized order. You can use headings, alphabetization, or a rank-order system demonstrating those areas which you consider most important.

Additionally, be aware that when referencing projects, that GitHub or other public representations go a long way to proving/demonstrating the value of the work.

- Supporting experience (for each item { $100 \leq \text{words} \leq 150$ })
 - From the above section, chose two (2) different skills, projects, or experiences which you consider central to your work. In the course of developing, learning, or deepening your experience in these areas, there undoubtedly specific moments or projects which made these concerns important. For each skill, briefly reflect on these moments.
- Ending ($10 \leq \text{words} \leq 20$)

In one sentence, attempt to summarize how all of the above stories, skills, and experience contribute to your unique self-portrait. This sentence can serve as the source for your **Title**

section (the tl;dr) of the work. This can also be phrased in the form of a question that you see as a significant part of solving an issue that you're more passionate about or interested in.

In the end, you should have a document which contains a minimum of 500 and a potential maximum of 750 words. First, a couple of protips:

- You may need to do some “process” writinglisting or brainstorming that leads you to remember or discover specific stories that fill the sections of the narrative requiring some story telling
- When reviewing your document for the first time, compare everything against your **Title**, **Opening**, and **Ending**. These sections are essentially your thesis for who you are as a developer
- “Voice” is a tricky word to use, but you can and should attempt to find ways to phrase things in unique waysparticularly your **Title** or if there are words that you think fit you that are somewhat made up
- Keeping the above in mind, hesitate to add words that seem buzzworthy or clich; two that come to mind: “hacker” and “ninja” (I am not sure that many folks in the discipline like these words, and they tend to be overused)
- If you're struggling to come up with words for a particular section, you may not be explaining ideas or stories in enough detail
- A note on difficulty: this assignment is deceptively difficult and should be; you very likely won't get it quite “right” at first, but think of this as a good start which can always be revised over the course of a student or professional career