MAT 200C

Research Tactics
and other practical actions
for artistic and academic agendas

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today:

1. please email me a link to a blog entry that contains the text from the 15 minute papers from last week

2. brief overview about your conferences

3. problem statements

4. look at your 10+ papers and identify as clearly as possible what the problem statements are.

conferences:

Who is their audience? What range of topics do they
   address? How prestigious are they? What is their
   acceptance rate? If there is a "best paper" award then
   what characterizes those papers?

When are the paper submissions due????

Do you have the appropriate expertise to submit an article
   to this conference? Why or why not?

How do academic Papers differ from other types of writing?

from text books or tutorials?

from book reviews or product reviews?

from surveys?

from instruction manuals?

from philosophy treatises?

etc...

they attempt to define and solve a problem
    within a particular discipline

and are talking to an audience made up of experts
    in that discipline
        who are familiar with these types of problems
        and who are skeptical of your ability
        to define and solve problems

A discipline is made up of the types of problems it is trying to solve.

Which implies a particular set of assumptions (or a philosophy) about what is meaningful, useful, important, interesting.

However, the papers themselves may not state this explicitly. And there is probably disagreement between practitioners of the field about this.

Standard unspoken metaphor about disciplines:

there is a ocean of knowledge that has been created/
shaped by decades of very intelligent people

and you are adding a little drop to this ocean.

That is, it is the *knowledge* that is important more than a
specific project or technique (though these are
intertwined).

Different opinions about what makes a good paper:

small thorough drops, even though they don't push any
  boundaries

→

large seismic asteroids which make a big impact, even
  though they aren't thorough or precise.

combination of the two?

Regardless of where your paper falls on this spectrum,
  you are required to frame your paper in terms of a

PROBLEM
  that you
IDENTIFY
  and
FRAME
  and then
SOLVE

  and one or more aspects of these must be original.

Problem Statement

Even before you make any claims / main points

you need to articulate the problem statement.

it does not have to be original,

but it has to be relevant, clear, timely, interesting, important, accurate, etc.

You may find that some papers have a vague problem statement.

They use it to position themselves within an ongoing discussion, but the actual contents of the paper don't directly address or try to solve this problem.

For example, ICMC papers very often talk about the "problems" of mapping and expressivity, but the actual content of the papers is generally about a specific project.

This is not in any way a bad thing, but it indicates that the problem statement is too big.

They are stating the obvious to an audience that already knows the parameters of the discourse.

Instead they should find a more appropriately sized problem statement more related to their specific projects.

This is a reason why media arts research isn't taken as seriously as it could be.

On the other hand, some fields like HCI and InfoVis sometimes take the opposite approach. Papers in those fields often have a very narrow problem statement.

And this comes across as pedantic or as not worth the effort of doing the research in the first place!

Exercise:

Look at your 10 papers from the homework assignment and summarize the problem statement. (Usually described tersely in the abstract and more discursively in the introduction).

Exercise:

Think about your papers. What problem is it solving (or at least addressing?)

Write a problem statement for your paper.

Read aloud, let's evaluate...

too vague? too narrow? plausible? interesting? solvable?
  important? believable?

recognized as a problem by others? too obvious? too
  specialized?

"Interpretive Summary"

1. Skim the paper

   find or make up some relationship between your work and the paper.

2. Find "Paper Patterns"

   identify general and specific patterns used in the paper to make arguments

3. Interpretive Summary

   write a summary of both the interesting points and of the broader research techniques and how they relate to your work.

   why would you cite this paper and what parts would you cite?

   what questions do you have?

   what do you understand or do not understand?

   how do you evaluate the paper's conclusions and main points (using multiple evaluation metrics)?