CMPSC 580
Topics and Research Methods in Computer Science
Spring 2015

Assignment 8
Writing for Computer Science **Précis**
Due 6 February 2015

What is a "Précis"?

A précis is a compact paraphrased summary of a longer work. For each of modules 2, 3, and 4 you will be assigned one or more sections of Zobel's book *Writing for Computer Science* and asked to write a one-page précis. Since the goal of the précis is to capture and paraphrase the *most important points* made in the original document, it forces you to think clearly about what you read.

Writing a précis is similar to writing an abstract, except that an abstract usually borrows words and sentences directly from the larger work and a précis is a paraphrase. Nevertheless, writing a précis is excellent practice for writing abstracts (which you will have do do throughout this class and your entire senior year), since it forces you to identify and focus on the essentials.

Write a Précis

Using LaTeX, create a one-page précis of chapters 1 and 2 in Zobel's *Writing for Computer Science.* If you believe that others might have chosen differently regarding the topics to highlight, or if you are yourself in doubt about which topics are most important, give reasons for the choices you made.

Write in a formal scholarly style. Review what you have learned in your FS and other courses about formal writing—write simply and objectively, paying attention to organization, grammar, spelling, and style. You do not need to provide citations, footnotes, or a bibliography.

A Final Word

The junior seminar is meant to simulate a real research group in a company or a university. A member of a research group should not feel inhibited about approaching another member of the group (or, for that matter, a faculty member) for advice, or to discuss an interpretation of a reading, or to ask for critical feedback on a document, project, or presentation. Similarly, group members should always be willing to act as a sounding board or to provide feedback to others.

> You may (and, in fact, you are ***encouraged*** to) discuss the chapters among yourselves and try to identify the most crucial points.

> You may (and, in fact, you are ***encouraged*** to) share drafts of this and future writing assignments with one another for review and constructive criticism.

It is possible to do this and still produce a document that is your own. The spirit of the Honor Code must still predominate, but you should now possess the maturity to be able to distinguish when you are "growing your ideas" in the fertile soil of shared discussion and criticism and when you are "taking somebody else's work and presenting it as your own." Do good work. Help one another. Please see the course instructor if you have questions about this matter!