Writing in English
pour les français…

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In|Situ| - INRIA Futurs

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My background

Writing
Working with professional copy editors

Translating software across Europe

Weekly lab reports

Reviewing
Program committees

Editor-in-chief, International Journal of Human-Computer Studies

CHI and ACM Publications Board

The Writing Process

History of Scientific Writing

17th century legal system
Defense, prosecution, judge

Scientific review process

Defense:	Author makes a claim
Prosecution:	Reviewers critique claim
Judge:	Program committee or editor decides

How to structure research paper?

NOT:
What I did, in chronological order

INSTEAD:
Find a 'hook': What is your claim?

What will the reader remember?
What is the citable result (one phrase)?

A 'standard' paper

Title:	Summary of contribution
Abstract:	Summary of problem & solution
Intro:	What is the problem?
Lit review:	What other research is relevant?
	Why is it insufficient?
Body:	What did you do?
	Details on what, how & why
Results:	What did you discover?
Conclusion:	Why it is important?

Writing is a process

Start with your work and analyse it:
    What is new? Surprising?   Why?
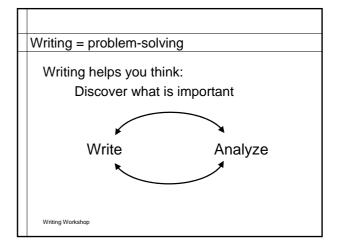   This is the basis of your claim

Then explain what you did:
    How does it justify your claim?

Writing is cyclic:
    Write, analyze, write, analyze

Writing Workshop

Writing = problem-solving

Writing helps you think:
    Discover what is important

Write   Analyze

Writing Workshop

Writing = problem-solving

Be careful with your claims:
    Not too strong   (avoid absolutes)
    Not too weak   (avoid qualifications)

Justify your claim:
    What support can you provide?
    How does it relate to other research?
    What is the (potential) impact?

Writing Workshop

Writing = Communicating

If the reader does not understand
    the paper will be rejected

Read what you write:
    Does one idea follow from another?
    Does one section lead to the next?
    Are the phrases clear and concise?
    Is the contribution of the paper clear?

Writing Workshop

Writing = Communicating

Good writing is not just good grammar or even good style:

    A well-written paper reflects
    clear thinking

Writing Workshop

Different audiences = Different styles

Specialists: Require precision, detail, rigor
    Assume fundamentals

Non-Specialists: Define jargon, provide context
    Refer to details

Non-researchers: No jargon, provide overview
    Link to real-world

Writing Workshop

French Literature vs. Technical English

Some overgeneralisations:

French:	Do not repeat the same word
English:	Use parallel structure
French:	Use complex sentences, multiple phrases
English:	Use short, direct sentences
French:	Use passive voice
English:	Use active voice

Elements of Style

Strunk & White:

Read it

Read it again

Key ideas: Be bold

Use parallel structure

Use active voice

Omit needless words

Specific Errors in English

(See separate document
for list of errors)

The Review Process

Review process

Peer-review is the key to our research system
BUT it is not perfect

YOU SHOULD REVIEW PAPERS !!!
Immitate the best authors
(learn what not to do from poor authors)

Essential for learning how to write research papers

Review confidentiality

Reviewing requires trust: it is an honor system

Some reviewing processes are anonymous or 'blind'
1. Hide authors and affiliations from reviewers
* 2. Hide all self-references from reviewers

Do not tell others whose papers you have reviewed (or what rating they got)
Do not report program committe discussions

Conflicts of interest

You may not review papers by your:
    Thesis advisor
    Close research collegues
    Members of your own organization

If you have a conflict of interest,
tell the program chair/editor and change papers

What is a good review?

You are talking to the program committee,
    Either to support the author (accept)
    or argue against (reject)

Short, vague reviews are USELESS
    and will probably be ignored
Avoid middle ratings (3 out of 5)
    Program committees prefer positive or
    negative ratings, not neutral.

How I review a paper

Title & Abstract: Is claim clear? Do I believe it?
Introduction: Understand problem space?
Conclusion: Linked to intro/abstract?
References: High quality? Right quantity?
    Long papers, not just workshops, URLs,
    books, Not too many self-references
Lit Review: Anyone missing? Critiques?
Body: Sound work? Clear?
Conclusion: Claims justified by work?

Reasons to reject a paper

Automatic reject:

Late	Too long
Wrong format	Wrong topic area
Already published[1]	

[1]More than 30% overlap with another
paper submitted or published at same level

NEVER DO THIS!!!

Reasons to reject a paper

Probable reject:

Writing	Poor English
	Poor structure
Claims	Not justified
	Overstated
Missing elements	References
Key error	Misanalysis
Originality	Incremental
Quality	Sloppy, errors

Sample review forms

Multimedia	Very quantitative
CHI	Mix quantitative & qualitative
UIST	Like CHI, omits neutral option

Multimedia '99 Review form:

5 quantitative questions:	5 possible ratings:
Appropriateness:	5 Strong accept
Originality:	4 Weak accept
Technical strength:	3 Undecided
Presentation:	2 Weak reject
Overall:	1 Strong reject

1 qualitative question:
    Comments

CHI'05 Review form:

2 quantitative questions:	Possible ratings:
Overall rating:	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Reviewer expertise:	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

6 qualitative questions:
    Contribution to HCI?
    Review
    Areas for improvement

    Additional comments
    Additional comments for the program committee (hidden)
    Other expertise comments (hidden)

UIST'02 Review form:

3 quantitative questions:	Possible ratings:
Confidence in review:	0, 1, 2
Best paper award?:	yes, probably, doubtful, no
Accept paper?:	yes, probably, doubtful, no

4 qualitative questions:
    Why should we accept this paper?
    Is the paper well written?
    Additional comments for authors
    Additional comments for the program committee

Somewhat negative: Summary

Confidence   0   (lots)
Accept?   1   (doubtful)

The paper describes XXX which examines personal calendars for the likelihood that someone will attend a particular meeting and makes this information available to selected colleagues. This is potential useful idea, but not a major contribution.

Somewhat negative: Scaling problem

The authors' stated goal is to solve a problem that arises in large corporate settings, i.e. people cannot reliably interpret each other's on-line calendars when scheduling time to see each other.

Yet this system has been created for and tested by a small set of researchers in a university setting (the authors') and I have doubts as to the scalability of the system.

Somewhat negative: Justification

The authors describe the different types of errors they found when predicting event attendance in their lab, but do not identify the consequences of these errors.

Of course, the answer depends on the users:

Is this system an improvement over guesses based on looking at their colleagues' public versions of their calendars? They authors do not demonstrate that their system is actually useful

Somewhat negative: Missing element

It is not clear how to verify that someone has actually attended particular meetings; most people don't mark on their calendars if they missed going to a presentation, for example. This makes it difficult to verify (or improve) the accuracy of the system.

Somewhat negative: Specific suggestion

Using bright red to indicate that someone is not likely to attend a meeting seems overly strong, since it usually warns of a serious problem. Consider testing other colors or methods of highlighting, with users.

Somewhat negative: Questioning claims

The authors claim that the calendar could suppport 25 people (based on the graphics used), but do not discuss how the system would work with overlapping workgroups in a large organization.

For example, can person A track B, C, D, & E, while person B tracks A, E, F & G? What are the consequences for one-way tracking? What about people who have to track many people, such as secretaries?

Negative: Summary

Confidence	0 (lots)
Accept?	1 (reject)

The basic concept, to provide an interactive tool for creating task models, seems reasonable given the interest in creating task models and the cumbersome nature of creating them by hand. However, The actual system seems rather standard, both in terms of its user interface and in terms of its approach to managing an interactive data hierarchy.

Negative: Contribution

The authors describe their main contribution as providing support for an interactive analysis of the model once it has been created, and the corresponding ability to compare task models. Yet the description of those comparisions is very vague and abstract. I would have liked to see at least one example of a comparision.

Negative: Writing

The writing is reasonably clear although the grammar should be checked and the paper should be copy edited. The introduction and related work sections are redundant. The paper would have been easier to follow if the authors had introduced a scenario that explained how a developer actually uses the XXX tool. The figures are too small to read and the captions for figures 3 and 4 appear to be reversed.

Negative: Missing reference

The authors do not cite fundamental work by XXX (CHI'xx) nor do they mention related work by YYY (CSCW'YY) and ZZZ (HCI'ZZ).

Negative: Comment to authors

The authors need to explain how this system is built and how it is used by users. The paper does not provide enough information for an experienced practitioner to duplicate this work.

Negative: Comment to committee

I do not believe that this is a UIST paper. It offers very little in terms of description or images to show the system in action and we cannot evaluate whether or not the system does what it claims to do, or how well.

Positive: Summary

Confidence   0 (lots)
Accept?   3 (Yes)

This paper presents an innovative approach to augmenting email systems, which have evolved into complex work management tools. The XXX system provides users with YYYY functionality. Because it works with existing email systems, users gain added functionality without being forced to switch email systems.

Positive: Justification

The authors discuss the different possible technical strategies for accomplishing this, and explain why they have chosen to change the email transmission channel itself, rather than the endpoints of the communication system.

The advantage of their approach is that it accommodates changes in transmission protocols and enables users to maintain a secure system.

Positive: Suggestion

The security issues in such a system are complex.
The authors have considered some of the issues in this implementation, but would clearly need to provide a greater level of security if this were implemented as a commercial system.

Positive: Justification

Overall, the paper provides a useful addition to an area that is extremely important to users but has been neglected by the research community, i.e. improving

email systems.

The paper is well written and provides enough detail that an experienced practitioner could duplicate the results.

Writing Workshop

Positive: Writing

The paper is well written and easy to follow.

I would have liked to see an example of what the users actually see and do when sending and receiving messages.

The authors tried variations of several approaches in their user tests. I would like to see the final choice that was tested over several months.

Writing Workshop

Positive: Structure

I liked the approach of providing a list of possible applications at the beginning of the paper, to motivate the work, and ending with a set of worked-out solutions based on these applications, at the end of the paper. However, I think the related work section belongs earlier in the paper and should be expanded to include a brief discussion of the work mentioned below.

Writing Workshop

Review process: Short papers, workshops, etc.

a. Assigned to reviewers (2-3)
   Sometimes randomly…
b. Chair evaluates reviews and decides:
   Good reasons: this author will contribute to the event
                 this research area is interesting
   Ok reasons (!): this author is my friend
                 we need more people to fill the space
c. These papers do not 'count' on your CV
   Useful for meeting people, but not
   considered 'real' publications

Writing Workshop

Review process: Conference papers

a. Assigned to reviewers (usually 3, max 5)
   Varied expertise in area (none -> expert)
   Varied experience (Ph.D. students = toughest)
b. Reviews sent to meta-reviewer
   Senior person in field, maybe not expert
c. Meta-review evaluated at program committee
   Articles ranked & discussed (conflicts out of room)
   Sometimes additional reviews needed
d. Program committee decides
   Rates vary: CHI = 1/5 or 1/6   accept/reject

Writing Workshop

Assigning papers

Program chairs (or meta reviewers) assign papers to reviewers

Goal: Find a balance of perspectives
   Expertise in the area?
   Seniority in the field?
   General HCI perspective?
   If multi-disciplinary work, are all relevant disciplines represented?

Writing Workshop

Review process: Journal articles

a. Assigned to reviewers (usually 2-3)
    Varied expertise in area (none -> expert)
    Varied experience (Ph.D. students = toughest)
b. Reviews sent to author
    Usually accept with revisions or reject
    A 'conversation' between reviewers and author
    Goal is to improve paper
c. If reviewers and editor agree: accept
    Else: reject
d. In our field, journal articles easier, take longer

Writing Workshop

Where to Publish?

Writing Workshop

Hierarchy of Publications

NON-PUBLICATIONS   (but do establish authorship)
    Workshop position papers, invited papers
    Conference short papers, posters, demos
    Company or lab technical reports
***   Books & Book chapters

REFEREED PUBLICATIONS   (in order)
    Long paper in peer-reviewed 'real' conference: French
    Long paper in peer-reviewed 'real' conference: International
    Article in peer-reviewed journal: French
    Article in peer-reviewed journal: International

Writing Workshop

Order of 'republication': 30% rule

First: Workshop position papers, invited papers
    Conference short papers, posters, demos
    Company or lab technical reports
Next: Tech Notes (UIST)
    Conference Long papers
Next: French Refereed journals
    International Refereed journals
Last: Book chapter
    Book

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Writing Workshop

Hierarchies: Conferences

CHI Letters:	CHI	Other ACM:
	CSCW	Multimedia,
AVI, DIS	UIST	Ubicomp,
PDC, IUIU		
IEEE conferences	InfoVIS, …	
IFIP conference	Interact	
Country conferences:	HCI (UK), IHM (France)	
	NordiCHI (Scandinavia)	
Doesn't count:	Hawaii HCI conference	

Writing Workshop

Hierarchies: Journals

HCI Journals
  IJHCS International Journal of Human-Computer Studies
  HCI   Human-Computer Interaction
  TOCHI ACM/Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction

British   Interacting with Computers
French   Revue d'Interaction Homme-Machine

Specialist   Pervasive Computing

Writing Workshop

Presenting your work

Writing Workshop

Can you describe your thesis?

1: Elevator   One-two sentences
2. Cocktail party   3-4 paragraphs
3. Short talk   10 minutes
4. Long talk   30 minutes
5. Defense   60 minutes

In each case, you need to communicate
   the key point

Writing Workshop