CompSci 725
Oral and Written Reports

v1.1 of 2 August 2019: corrected date on slide 8

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Slideshow Length

- You should prepare five to nine slides for an eight- to twelve-minute seminar.
- If you spend less than one minute on a slide, it should have very little technical content.
  - You might devote 20 seconds to your title slide.
- If you spend more than two minutes talking about a slide, you should probably split its content into two slides.
  - Your important points should be made verbally, as well as in writing.
  - Your slideshow should tell a coherent story.
  - Your verbal comments should help your audience understand your story.

Creating your Oral Presentation

1. Read your article again, to identify an interesting aspect that you can explain.
2. Construct a first draft of your presentation.
   - Use a presentation builder (e.g. PowerPoint), not a document editor (e.g. Word).
3. Rehearse your draft presentation by yourself, then rehearse with a friend.
4. Revise your draft presentation after each rehearsal.
5. Deliver your draft presentation at a tutorial, in the week prior to the week in which you'll be presenting in a lecture period.
6. Prepare a final version of your presentation slides, after hearing suggestions for improvement at your tutorial.
7. On the day you present your oral report, please arrive early so that you can copy your slides onto the computer at the lecture podium.
   - I will copy your presentation file to the class website, for reference by other students, unless you forbid this (in which case I'll put it up on Canvas).
8. You'll probably spend **10 hours** preparing a good 10-minute presentation.

Your Lecturers' Expectations

- Each presentation will be focused on *one* interesting or important aspect of a technical article.
  - Each presenter will develop their own point-of-view on their article.
  - Multiple students *may* present on similar aspects of the same article.
- Non-presenters will read each article *before* its presentation begins.
- All students will participate, at least occasionally, in the classroom discussions held after each oral presentation.
  - We will discuss similarities and differences in our points of view.
  - Some of us may have some relevant experience or knowledge.
- All students will develop a working knowledge of what was presented and discussed in class.
  - We try to write exam questions which require students to demonstrate working knowledge.
  - For example, in an exam question we may quote a passage from an article on your required list, and ask you to comment on it. You will get high marks if, and only if, your commentary is well-informed by knowledge you gained from readings and discussions in our course.

Assessment: 25% written report

- (Please refer to slides 4 and 5 of the introductory slideshow)

Assessment of Written Reports

- 20 marks: Sources
  - Are your sources relevant and professional?
- 30 marks: Accuracy of Transcription
  - Should a professional rely on the information you present in your report?
- 50 marks: Depth of Interpretation
  - Would a professional learn anything important by reading your report?

Sources (20 marks)

- 0 marks: your report relies heavily on non-authoritative sources.
  - A Wikipedia article *might* have accurate information.
    - Read one of its cited, authoritative, sources. Write about this source. Don't paraphrase a Wikipedia article!
  - A manuscript deposited at arXiv might, or might not, be authoritative.
    - Be sure to ask me for advice, before relying on an unreviewed article as an authoritative source for your report.
  - An article that is "telling a story" but is not making a technical argument, or is not citing its sources, may give you some useful ideas.
    - You must cite such articles if you are repeating (or summarising) their stories in your report.
    - You should not expect me, or any technically-competent reader, to believe unsubstantiated stories.
  - You should not expect me, or any security specialist, to read a non-technical story, unless it is illustrating or motivating a technical argument.
    - Stories can be very important for motivation or illustration, even though they don't "prove" anything.
- 10 marks: your report relies heavily on articles that are written for non-specialist technical audiences.
  - Generalist magazines include *IEEE Computer* and *IEEE Security and Privacy*.
- 20 marks: your report relies primarily on three articles written by and for specialists.
  - You may cite additional articles. Warning: don't over-reach, you'll do better with a narrow topic.
  - If you're reading an article that doesn't have a bibliography, or one which cites only ephemera such as webpages, you can be sure this article was *not* written for a specialist audience.
    - Nobody can confirm the validity of its assertions of fact, since its sources aren't declared.
    - It isn't "connected" to the specialist literature – which may have stronger findings, or contrary ones.
    - It may be using non-standard terminology, inappropriate definitions, or unreliable methodologies.

Accuracy (30 marks)

- 0 marks: if we notice frequent spelling errors, inaccurately-transcribed technical content, or very careless formatting.
  - If you're reading a report that has been carelessly prepared, would you trust anything you read?
- 30 marks: if we *don't* notice any misspelled or misused technical words, nor any other error which could have been caught by a reasonably-careful *proofreading and fact-checking*.
  - This includes the bibliography. When we're fact-checking, we will attempt to read the same source as you did, so you must provide us with adequate and accurate bibliographic detail.
- Don't worry about the fine points of English grammar!
  - We'll be reading for technical content.
  - If your meaning is clear to us, then your syntax and grammar is "operationally fit for purpose" in this course.
    - If your writing isn't fully fit-for-purpose as a professional communication to a native English-speaking audience, we won't mark you down but we will give you some feedback in our detailed comments.

Technical Depth (50 marks)

- 0 marks: if all technical content is quoted or lightly paraphrased, and is attributed accurately to its published source.
  - If you don't cite your sources, your report is academically dishonest.
- 10 marks: if your writing exhibits some technical understanding of one source
- 20 marks: if your writing exhibits some technical understanding of multiple sources
- 30 marks: if your writing exhibits some ability to develop a valid point of view that is based on multiple sources
- 40 marks: if your report does a good job of comparing and contrasting technical information from multiple sources, or if it synthesises technical information in some other non-trivial and valid way.
- 50 marks: if your report does an excellent job of synthesising information from multiple sources, developing a non-trivial conclusion or insight.

Start working now on your Written Report!

- When reading your article for your oral report, you should think about whether or not you want to use it as a basis for a written report.
  - You can base your report on any aspect of any required reading, including Lampson04 ("Computer Security in the Real World").
- Structural ideas:
  - Compare/contrast your article's technology (or analysis, or research finding, or some other aspect) to another published work.
  - Think about how your article could be extended, find one or two articles discussing a similar extension, then write about the feasibility and desirability of this extension.
  - Clarify a point of confusion or difficulty in your article. (Did anyone citing your article mention this problem?)
  - Formulate a "research question", and update it as you learn more. Try to form an interesting question which you can answer in your term paper. (Draw the bulls-eye around your arrow ;-)

Suggested Search Process

1. You already have one reliable source of technical information: a required reading in this course.
2. Find more sources by…
   a) Finding sources that cite your reliable source (use Google Scholar, CiteSeer, or Web of Science).
   b) Finding sources that are cited by your reliable source (use its bibliographic information)
   c) Finding other sources written by the author(s) and co-authors of your reliable source (use www.google.com to find their website; use http://www.informatik.uni-trier.de/~ley/db/ to find their pubs)
   d) Identify key words and phrases, use these to search with Google scholar, library databases.
   e) Look at "nearby" articles: same journal, same conference.
3. Identify unreliable sources:
   a) Ephemera (anything non-archival) e.g. Wikipedia, web-copies of books which you can't retrieve through our Library, blogs, webpages
   b) Non-authoritative: e.g. self-published manuscripts, proceedings of unrefereed conferences, articles in journals that will publish anything submitted (if the author pays for this privilege).
   c) Send email to your instructors if you're unsure.
4. Narrow your topic, to limit the number of relevant sources.
   a) A "perfectly-scoped topic" has exactly three highly-relevant and reliable sources.
   b) Perfection is the enemy of the good. You're on a strict time-budget!
   c) You will refine your topic *after* you learn more about it, through reading your sources carefully, through thinking, and through writing your first draft.

Feedback on a Proposed Topic

- Students who would like early feedback from me on their written report should upload a file to Canvas by midnight on Friday, 30 August (end of Week 6) with
  - A synopsis or proposed topic (one or two sentences; not just a word or phrase),
  - Bibliographic detail on your "base" article (a required reading), and
  - Bibliographic detail (at least author, title, DOI, year) on at least one other proposed reference.
- We will endeavour to give you some helpful feedback on your proposal by the end of the mid-semester break (Sunday, 15 September).
  - We award 1 mark for any reasonable submission.
  - Note: if you haven't started working seriously on your written report *before* the mid-semester break, you have fallen badly behind in your work for this course.
  - You should be spending about 10 hours per week on each of your courses.