

Week 6

- Reviewing: Giving and receiving feedback

Review and rewrite to refine your understanding and improve quality

- Week 1: Getting started.
- Week 2: Find literature and methods
- Week 3: Understand issues, build methods skills
- Weeks 4-5: Start writing, make progress
- Week 6: Draft report, refine your understanding
- Week 7. Full report, time Management
- Week 8. All systems go

Reviewing: Giving and receiving feedback

1. What is feedback?
2. What does “critique” mean? Is it the same as criticism?
3. Do I need to write a cover letter for every piece of work?
4. Positive feedback is nice, but why not just tell me what’s wrong with the work?
5. What goes in each draft and when should I seek feedback?
6. What are the different levels of feedback?
7. What do you mean by “see your work in the third person”?
8. Why shouldn’t I swear at the reviewer?
9. Why should I provide feedback for others – I’m here to learn, not to teach!
10. How many papers or chapters should I read for other people?

- From the Research methods FAQ

What is feedback?

- Feedback is any form of comment on your ideas or written work.
- It can help you improve your work in many ways:
 - by assisting you to see your work through the eyes of a reader,
 - by pointing out errors or ambiguities,
 - by suggesting corrections.
- Skilful use of feedback involves considering every comment that reviewers make. For a journal paper, every comment needs to be resolved and in one way or another. For each comment make a conscious decision on whether you will:
 - a. agree and implement
 - b. disagree and seek to understand why the comment was made: Could the description be improved? Was it obscure or ambiguous? Is there a difference of opinion in the field?
 - c. don't implement and seek to resolve in a different way: Is the suggestion outside the scope of the thesis?

What is feedback?

- All feedback should be treated as suggestions, rather than instructions on how to change your work.
- The final form of the document is your own.
- Feedback on your work is a rare and precious thing.
 - Treat it as a gift and treasure it well.
 - Use it to see your work through the eyes of your reader and gain insight into where your work can be improved.

What does “critique” mean?

Is it the same as criticism?

- A critique is an insightful review of a paper or piece of work.
- It is not the same as the colloquial use of the word “criticism” which is merely finding faults.
- In a critique, the reviewer appreciates the nature of the work, who is the intended audience, what are the strong points, and the level of feedback requested.

Do I need to write a cover letter for every piece of work?

- On any piece of work the following information is useful when people ask for feedback:
 - your name (they may have many papers that they are reading)
 - working title of the paper/thesis/chapter
 - version number and date
 - page numbers
 - *brief* cover note explaining where the writing process is up to and asking for the type of feedback desired
 - time frame in which the feedback is needed

Positive feedback is nice, but why not just tell me what's wrong with the work?

Effective feedback has two parts:

1. You need to know what is good about your work so that you don't change it in the next iteration. It can also hone your understanding of the importance of the project and how to write about it.
 - Ask yourself what you consider good.
 - Ask your reviewer if there are additional aspects they considered good.
2. Consider what could be improved.
 - If you already know sections need improvement, tell your reviewer!
 - Ask your reviewer what additional aspects could be improved.
 - Sometimes your reviewer may consider your own critique is too stringent, and the paper could present the work in progress with much less additional work than you are considering.
 - At other times, your reviewer may consider that the work in general needs to reach a much higher standard of quality than you were considering.

What goes in each draft and when should I seek feedback?

- Feedback can be beneficial at all stages of writing, from the early brainstorming to the final polished presentation.
- Different stages of writing admit different types of feedback.

Initial conceptions

- Start by brainstorming to explore the scope (breadth and depth) of the work.
 - Work out your ideas in point form or using a concept map.
 - Feedback is often useful at this stage through a conversation about the ideas.
 - Ask a friend if you can use them as a sounding board.
 - Share ideas on a whiteboard.
 - Write yourself some notes and read them the next day to give yourself feedback.

Beta draft

- Rough out the logic of the paper.
 - Choose a working title (or several), a contents page or list of headings, the main point or “thesis” that the paper will make, and the introduction in point form (e.g., Swales).
 - Feedback is most useful at this stage on the logic of the arguments.
 - Put your own logic through the wringer and ask others to do the same.
 - If it doesn’t hold up at this stage, it won’t look any better and will be much harder to fix later on.

First draft

- Write the paper, explaining everything that needs to be explained.
 - The first complete draft is written for yourself. Write it quickly.
- The paper will eventually need a clear structure and good content, but the first draft just needs content and structure. You can:
 - write the structure first, and then fill in the details
 - write the details and rearrange paragraphs to extract the structure
- Seek feedback only where you really need clarity on issues such as “should this or that be included”.
 - This draft is to get something down on paper, not to show anyone else.
- Why bother with a first draft when it’s not going to be shown to anyone?
 - It’s a good way to separate the required content from the actual writing.
 - It stops you being blocked by being perfectionist or not knowing what to say.

Second draft

- Be your own first reviewer.
 - Transform your writer-centred prose into reader-centred prose.
 - Think about it from the reader's perspective.
 - Who is your main audience? What do they already know? What will they find interesting in this paper?
 - Seek selected feedback from one or two people on the global structure and logical flow of the second draft.
 - If you wait a few days, you can even act as your own reviewer for the second draft.

Third draft

- Incorporate the feedback, rewriting as necessary.
 - Revise as necessary until the paper communicates the message you want it to say.
 - Seek help on any aspects of writing style that were identified as needing work.
 - Reread Strunk and White.
 - Reread the best examples of the type of paper or thesis you are writing.
 - Use them to refine your writing skills.

Fourth draft

- Polish the paper until it is as perfect as you can get it.
 - Now it is ready to be distributed more widely.
 - Seek a broader range of feedback.
 - Honours, Masters and PhD theses are often submitted at this stage although many would benefit from an additional cycle or two of revision.

Drafting for journal submission

- A journal quality paper usually take three more revisions, involving cycles of polishing and incorporating feedback.
 - The 7th draft is the version to send to the journal as a submission.
 - There are urban myths about papers that have been sent to seven different journals before finally being accepted.
 - The authors could have saved years of frustration on their own part and those of the first six editors and reviewers by revising the manuscripts seven times and then submitting it once.

“people can give you only what you give
them the opportunity to provide”

(Source unknown)

Attendance sheet

Break

What are the different levels of feedback?

- Feedback can be sought – and given – at several levels.
- Ask your reader for specific types of guidance:
 - Global structure, logical consistency, argument structure
 - Style, grammar, flow of paragraphs.
 - Proofreading (only the fourth draft and above)

See your work in the third person

- It is a trap to identify too tightly with our own ideas and our own written work.
 - The third person is someone who is not you, and not connected to you.
 - Take a moment to view your work as someone else's brain child rather than your own.
 - Imagine it as a work in progress by someone else describing a project that you are hearing about for the first time.
 - This distance allows you to appreciate critiques of the work, rather than criticisms of you personally.

Reviewers

“No reviewer is ever wrong.”

– (Meyer, 1996 p. 280)

...of course, that doesn't mean that what they say is what they say makes sense, or actually reflects what you should do.

Do I *have* to incorporate every comment a reviewer makes?

- Yes... and no.
- Some of them don't make sense!
 - Take the time to consider every comment that a reviewer makes, but it is your choice what to incorporate.
 - Each comment says something about the quality of your writing.
 - If the reviewer misunderstands, it tells you that:
 - definitions may be missing; or
 - explanations are not clear; or
 - explanations are ambiguous in a way you had not considered.
- In other words, you have to incorporate every comment that a reviewer makes, but you don't necessarily have to do what they think they wanted.

If the reviewer didn't understand my work, why should I pay attention to their comments? (Why shouldn't I swear at the reviewer?)

- Thank your reviewer for their efforts!
 - They have done you a service that you could not do for yourself
 - They have read your work as a reader and given you that benefit
- When exposing an idea for comment, many students feel that any critique of the work is a criticism of them personally. Nothing could be further than the truth.
 - When someone donates their time to assisting you in developing your skills, it is a high complement that you are worth such an effort on their part.

Why should I provide feedback for others

– I'm here to learn, not to teach!

- The best way to learn is to teach.
 - Providing feedback to others is one of the fastest ways to see what works and what doesn't, without having to make all the painstaking discoveries and time consuming mistakes yourself.
- Understanding why papers are published or not

How many papers or chapters should I read for other people?

- A general principle is that you learn most from the first three examples of each type of writing.
- A fair system is provide as much feedback as you seek to gain for yourself.
 - Often the feedback is not one-for-one with the person you interact with: a new PhD student might offer to read a chapter of a completing student.
 - Your supervisor might provide feedback on your thesis, and you might provide feedback on a thesis of fellow student.
 - Even if you cannot return the service to exactly the same person, the idea is to contribute to the community you are part of.

How many papers or chapters should I read for other people?

- In providing feedback, time is often much more assistance than quantity.
 - Three pithy comments that take you half an hour can provide more assistance than three pages that take a month.
- Depending on the refinement of the material, several iterations of quick feedback (say 15 mins) may be more useful than one in-depth reading (say 1 hour).

Progress report

Exercise

- Using the mark sheet questions to assess the quality of each section of the draft report

Marking scheme Details

Topic, goal and relevance (25%): A clear definition of the topic, goals and relevance will leave the reader with no doubt about the intended coverage and contribution of the thesis. The definitions should include a project outline and clear statement of purpose. The supervisor also indicates the degree of student initiative in identifying the topic, goal and relevance.

Review of background and related work (25%): Background material for the thesis will most likely include a review of the literature in the area of the thesis, perhaps material from texts and previous theses that cover the background theory, and a review of prior art where applicable. This review should not only help the reader understand the rest of the document, but should illustrate to the reader a mastery of the material in the topic area, demonstrated by appropriate depth and coverage of material reviewed, and by the successful comparison and discussion of the different material presented. The supervisor also indicates the degree of independence by which the relevant background is identified and mastered. Indirectly, the ability of the student to find the relevant literature is tested.

Project plan (25%): The project plan should consist of a well justified, comprehensive list of logically ordered tasks with logical milestones – each clearly relating to the project aims. Progress made so far should be articulated in relation to the plan. Each task should be assigned expected resource requirements (if any) and durations. The supervisor indicates demonstrated problem solving skills – how readily the student engages with problems, how well the student analyses, breaks down, makes predictions about problems and their solutions. The supervisor indicates demonstrated creativity and self-reliance in identifying the project plan.

Presentation (25%): The document should be well structured and easy to read. The presentation needs to be succinct and concise, without spelling mistakes or errors of grammar. The report must demonstrate appropriate referencing to a correctly formatted bibliography.

Progress reports won't have all the
answers

How do you say “I don’t know” in a research proposal?

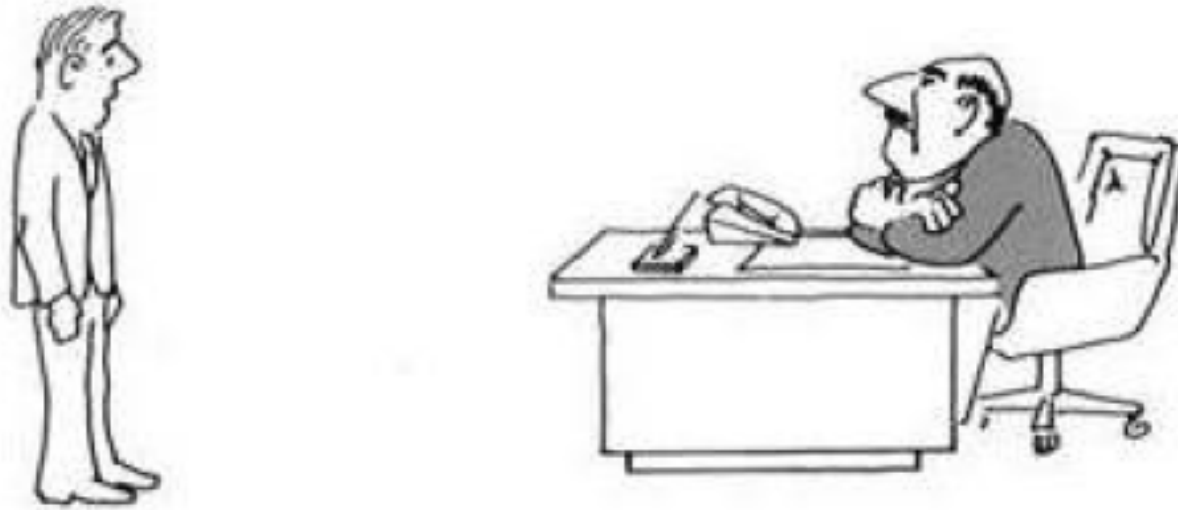
- The progress report requires a timeline and plan for the rest of the year.
- If you knew all the steps required, it wouldn’t be research.
- How do you write about uncertainty without sounding stupid?

Two Tales about uncertainty

- Case A.

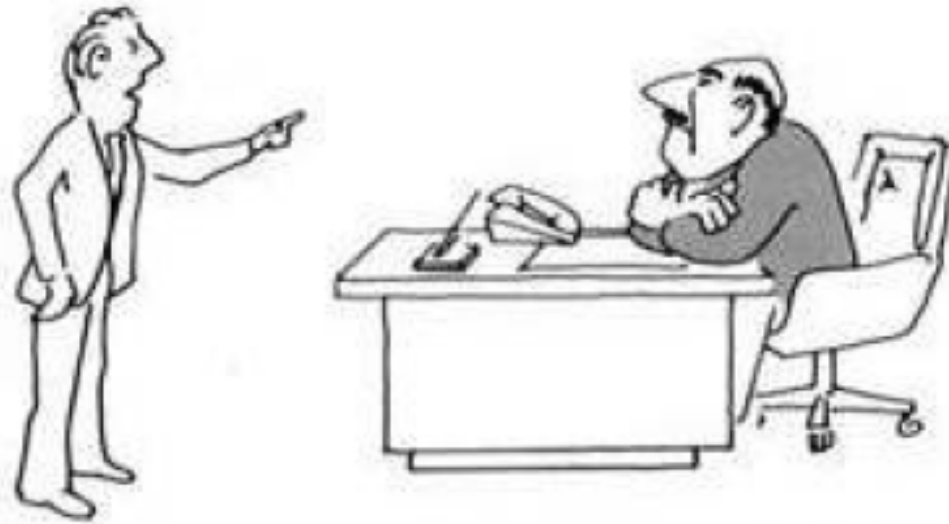
Finding optimal algorithms ...

Dealing with uncertainty



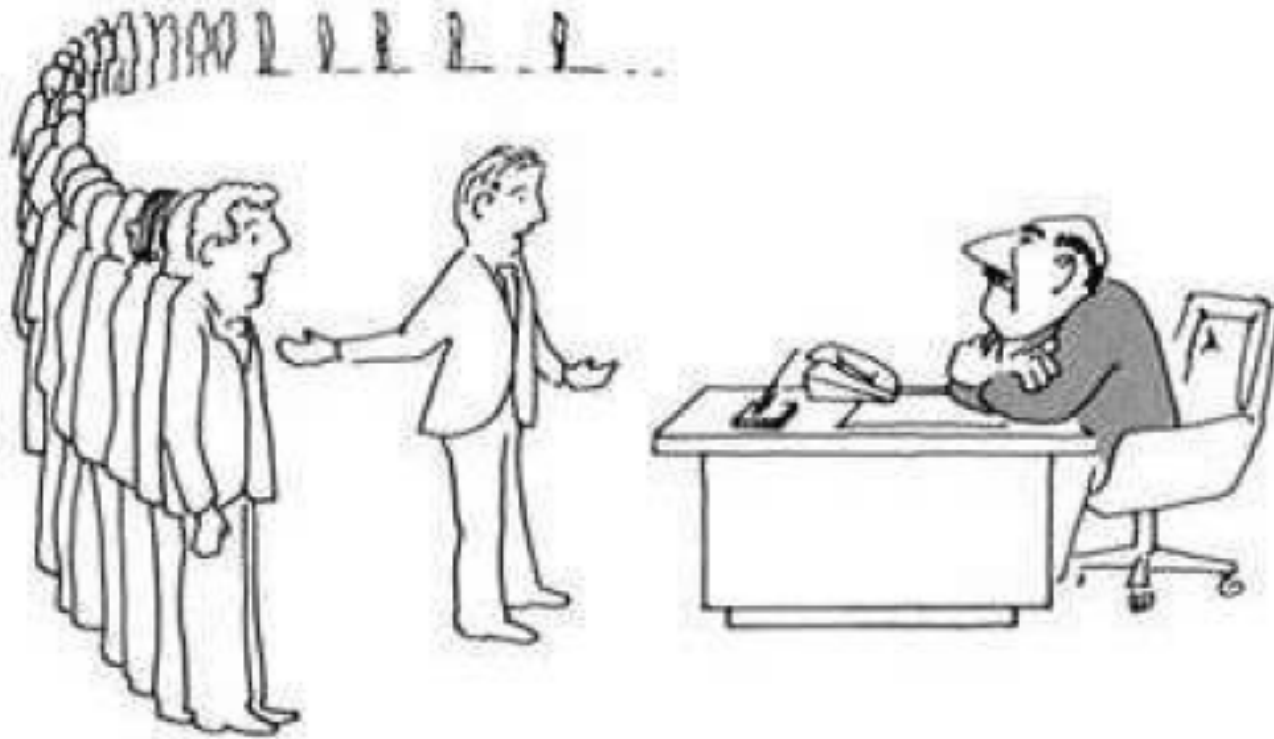
"I can't find an efficient algorithm, I guess I'm just too dumb."

Dealing with uncertainty



"I can't find an efficient algorithm, because no such algorithm is possible!"

Dealing with uncertainty



"I can't find an efficient algorithm, but neither can all these famous people."

Two Tales about uncertainty

Case A

Finding optimal algorithms ...

Case B

Passing a medical specialist exam ...

Medical Exam: How to deal with uncertainty

1. "I don't know"

FAIL

2. Guess an answer

FAIL

3. Outline the options and show
how to choose between them

a. It could be X, Y, or Z

PASS

b. It could be X, Y, or Z, to find
out, use the XXX test

Excellent

Exercise: Swales

- mark each sentence or paragraph with 1, 2, 3, or 4 according to which section of swales they correspond to.

Introductions a la Swales

- **Move 1. Establish field**
 - Assert centrality
 - State current knowledge
- **Move 2. Summarise previous research**
 - Outline issues in literature
- **Move 3. Prepare for present research**
 - Indicate a gap
 - Raise a question
- **Move 4. Introduce present research**
 - State purpose
 - Outline present research

Progress report

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Exercise

- Using the mark sheet questions to assess the quality of each section of the draft report

Clarity in writing
promotes
clarity in thinking

Exercise:

Writing about design decisions

In describing a technical system, what is the difference between the following aspects of the design?

Scenario: You're a chef planning a banquet for a visiting dignitary.

Discuss each of the 9 aspects.

1. Issues
2. Overall goals
3. Specific Aims
4. Assumptions
5. Options
6. Criteria
7. Decisions
8. Rationale
9. Tradeoffs

Writing about design decisions

1. Issues: These describe the situation (independent of you)
2. Overall goals: Your general goals (there will be many ways to achieve them)
3. Specific Aims: A specific way to achieve the goals
4. Assumptions: The starting points
5. Options: The range of possibilities
6. Criteria: How will you measure if you've done a good job?
7. Decisions: What decisions do you have to make?
8. Rationale: What are your reasons for each decision?
9. Tradeoffs: What tradeoffs were considered in the decision?

Refining your writing
refines your thinking

Exercise: rephrase for clarity

Study 1.1.1

The purpose of this study is to consider the effect of changing the output size of the network, especially whether languages were able to be found or learnt easily. An output structure is to be chosen to be used for the remaining studies.

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Exercise: rephrase for clarity

Study 1.1.1

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Use informative names for headings, studies

Change "this" and "it" to more informative phrases

Where you test a changing variable, think about the test at a higher level as an experimental design

Study 1A: Output Structure

The purpose of Study 1A is to consider the effects of network size on the learnability of languages in order to choose an appropriate output representation.

Exercise: Discuss each aspect in the example

Study 1.1.1

The purpose of this study is to consider the effect of changing the output size of the network, especially whether languages were able to be found or learnt easily. An output structure is to be chosen to be used for the remaining studies.

Study 1A: Output Structure

The purpose of Study 1A is to consider the effects of network size on the learnability of languages in order to choose an appropriate output representation.

ASPECT

- Issues
- Overall goals
- Specific Aims
- Assumptions
- Options
- Criteria
- Decisions
- Rationale
- Tradeoffs

Polished Progress Report

- Due date Friday Week 7
- Submit to the online submission system linked from the Research Project page (not the comp4809/7809 page)
<http://www.itee.uq.edu.au/~comp6803/>
<http://www.itee.uq.edu.au/~enggg4803/>
- And give a hard copy to your supervisor

D6 Elevator Pitch

An “elevator pitch” is a brief description of the motivation and aims of your project.

Imagine you have walked into an elevator with the chairman of the Faculty Research committee, Professor Schaffer, who comments that they are looking to fund interesting research in the coming months. He then asks what your project is about. It’s not a long elevator ride – you have 30 seconds to get the message of your project across. What would you say?

D6 Elevator Pitch

- *motivation and aims of your project* -

Task 1. Write an elevator pitch for your project and submit it to the online submission (aim for a message that takes you about 30 seconds to say).

Task 2. Bring a copy of your elevator pitch to class in week 8.

Tips

- Try explaining your project in non-technical terms to a few people who don't know your work, and watch their faces to see what explanations are most useful.
- Typically, the first draft takes about 3-5 minutes, which you can hone and polish until the message is very clear and can be communicated well in 30 seconds.

There is perfection in timing not just in doing the work.