
How to Write CHI Papers – Second Edition

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Abstract

Everything that we do as researchers is based on what we write. Especially for graduate students and young researchers, it is hard to turn a research project into a successful CHI publication. This struggle continues for postdocs and young professors trying to provide excellent reviews for the CHI community that pinpoint flaws and improvements in research papers. This second edition of the successful CHI paper writing course provides hands-on advice on how to write papers with clarity, substance, and style. It is structured into three 80-minute units with a focus on writing and reviewing respectively.

Author Keywords

Writing; Reviewing; Research Methods; Style; Clarity.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.2. Evaluation/Methodology.

Benefits

Writing and reviewing papers is at the heart of our craft as CHI researchers. Yet, good writing sometimes seems ephemeral to us when trying to structure our research ideas around what we perceive as the demands of the CHI community. In last year's edition of this course, I tried to teach both paper writing and reviewing in 2 course units. However, most of the feedback from par-

		Schedule
Unit 1	Structure	
	0-9	Intro and Goals
	10-39	Micro Lecture: Structuring your Research
	40-80	Tutorial: Dissecting a CHI Paper
Unit 2	Abstract and Intro	
	0-10	Recap
	11-30	Micro Lecture: The Importance of the Introduction
	31-80	Exercise: Writing the Abstract and Introduction
Unit 3	Full Paper	
	0-10	Revision of CHI Paper Structure
	31-80	Tutorial and Exercise: Bullet pointing the CHI paper

Table 1: The schedule for three 80-minute course sessions at CHI with a break in between.

Participants was focused around extending the time for teaching paper writing in this course and using the skills I taught in the reviewing section for writing papers. Hence, I have reworked the course structure with focus on writing. While some helpful work exists online [5,10-12] with lots of writing and research structure advice for CHI authors [1,2,9,13], it has only recently been synthesized into this course format.

Students will learn the practical writing skills that enable them to “trim the fat” in their writing and focus on bringing the essential information about their research across in the first course unit (some of the advice being taken from essential style guides [6-8]). They will also learn to dissect a CHI paper into its units and map those units to their own research structure. In the second course unit, I will outline the importance of the introduction and abstract and through exercises they will learn how to structure their CHI paper around a research narrative that focuses on solving a main problem and outlining a strong contribution using exploratory learning [3]. In the third course unit, we focus on a hands-on tutorial that helps them outline their CHI papers by section and draft in the bullet points for each section that will eventually lead to the full paper. By following a clear structure and focusing on lean writing, participants will learn what reviewers are looking for and how to signpost this information to make papers more attractive to read.

Participants will leave this course with improved writing skills, which they will have exercised during the course and also a wealth of knowledge about CHI paper structure, style, and content, which will be expanded online at the URL: <http://chicourse.academic.com>.

Intended Audience

This course introduces principles about writing and reviewing for CHI to a largely junior audience. However, this does not mean that this course is not useful for senior CHI researchers, but the primary target audience are junior researchers. Thus, this course is particularly useful for young researchers, ranging from graduate students to postdocs and junior faculty. The expectation for the course audiences is that people have at least tried to submit a paper to CHI before (not necessarily that they have had one accepted), so that they are familiar with basic PCS terminology and the concept of the CHI conference (and CHI research in general).

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course other than visiting the online course materials before the conference to familiarize oneself with some of the course concepts and to listen to the interviews.

Content

The course is structured into three units (see Table 1), the first one on research structure, the second one on Abstract and Introduction, and the third one on a hands-on writing tutorial for CHI papers. At the start of the **first unit**, the participants are introduced to the course instructor and the course goals:

- Become a better writer by learning how to avoid unnecessary words and give each sentence a strong meaning
- Understand the goals of CHI research and what makes a strong CHI contribution

- Learn how to structure your paper around a compelling research narrative to emphasize your research problem and solution as main drivers
This is followed by a micro lecture and a hands-on tutorial.

Unit 1 Micro Lecture: Structuring Your Research

This lecture introduces the positioning of research papers and how to narrow the research problem space toward a unit that can be presented at CHI. The tutorials and exercises are discussed in the practical work section. In the **second course unit**, I will shift the focus toward writing an introduction and abstract after a brief revision.

Unit 2 Micro Lecture: The Importance of the Introduction

This lecture will give the participants an overview of what reviewers are looking for in an abstract and an introduction of a CHI paper. It closely follows four questions (i.e., What's the real-world problem that you are trying to solve? Why is it important to solve this problem? What's the solution that you came up with to solve it? How do you know that the solution is a good solution to your initial problem?) that the participants will need to answer.

Practical Work

Unit 1 Tutorial 1: Dissecting a CHI Paper

For this tutorial, participants will get a published CHI paper and discuss how some of the excellence criteria learned in the first unit can be applied to the writing found in the paper. I will run this exercise as a structured discussion (40 minutes).

Unit 2 Exercise 1: Writing the CHI Abstract and Introduction

In many of the interviews that I have conducted with senior CHI researchers, the abstract and introduction have been mentioned as the most important structural parts of a CHI paper. In this exercise, I will give the participants work materials for building clear abstracts and introduction to their CHI research work that helps structuring their introduction section (30 minutes). The written paragraphs are passed around and discussed in groups with regards to answering the research questions (20 minutes).

Unit 3 Tutorial and Exercise: Bullet pointing the CHI paper

Building on the abstracts and introductions that we have built in the previous exercise, we will then outline the rest of the CHI paper with bullet points. I will show a couple of examples (10 minutes) and then participants will write their own bullet points (20 minutes), then we will discuss in front of the class how effective those bullet points communicate the research goals using examples from participants (20 minutes).

Instructor Background

Lennart E. Nacke, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor for Human-Computer Interaction and Game Design at the University of Waterloo. He has many years of experience serving on SIGCHI program and steering committees and teaching University graduate classes on HCI research methods. Dr. Nacke has co-organized many workshops for CHI over the past five years; he also chaired the CHI PLAY 2014 and Gamification 2013 conferences, served as technical program co-chair for CHI PLAY 2015 and CHI Games and Play subcommittee co-chair for CHI 2017, and is currently the chair of the CHI

PLAY steering committee. He has also reviewed hundreds of papers and gotten lots of his own submissions rejected from CHI (sometimes for good reasons).

Resources

To expand the course, I have gathered additional information online from interviews with senior CHI research colleagues, which I plan to expand in the future, available at <http://chicourse.acagamic.com>.

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