Heidi Schelhowe                                                                          8 June 2010

# Some notes and hints on how to write an academic paper

## TOPIC

Narrow down your subject, be as specific as possible. Concentrate on one main argument, one piece of software/one installation

Be clear about the theoretical background you want to relate to. To which field of Digital Media/Computer Science does your software belong?

## ABSTRACT

Do not mix up what an abstract and what an introduction should contain. An abstract should summarize your results for a reader who quickly wants to get an overview of your paper. The reader has to be informed about the problem (in one sentence or two), but try then to summarize your paper's subject, aims and results.

## INTRODUCTION

You have to gain the reader's interest in your topic with the first sentences. This can be done by starting with a more general remark or question that most people might be interested in. It can also be solved by mentioning an exciting specific case or example that gains the attention and interest of the reader (often the more exciting, but also more difficult path). Then give the reader a clear picture of what the aim of your paper is, what are the main questions you want to address and to answer? Give a short overview of the content of the individual chapters.

## MAIN PART

Think about a clear structure for the main part. It has to follow a clear line of argument.

1. Describe the state-of-the-art in literature you want to relate to. Show what questions arise in literature that might be answered (or attempted at least) by your paper. Don't be too general, relate your literature review to the topic you have chosen.

2. Other existing products/software/installations could be an own chapter. Sometimes also experiences/literature from non-digital fields.

3. Describe the software you have decided on as clearly as possible (requirements, functionality, navigation/interaction, design, usage). Think of a reader who does not know the software at all. In some cases also one or more use-scenarios are helpful.

4. Evaluate the software carefully in the light of your question (introduction), whether through arguing reasonably or having read about user tests or own user testing carried out.

5. Relate your results to your research question and to the state-of-the-art in the field.

## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER WORK

Summarize the results of your investigation. Come back to the aims you formulated in the introduction. Show how your work contributes to the field. State what has to be done in future in order to answer the question, to reach the aim better. Be critical with what your own contribution has been. But do not hesitate to express your own opinions.

## WRITING STYLE

Think about transitions between chapters and paragraphs. Indicate for the reader what you will argue next ("sign posting"). Be careful with general remarks like "no contributions to this field exist" or "no other author…" Mostly (not always) these kinds of remark are results of poor research. Do not use footnotes too often. Not only direct quotes have to be indicated, but also if you take over ideas and re-phrase them in your own words, you have to indicate the source. Otherwise this will be called plagiarism and you cannot get any credits for the paper (in serious cases this can even lead to expulsion).

## FORMAT, STYLE

Concerning the layout your are free to make your own decisions. Take care that the text is easy to read and pleasant to look at.  For your final thesis should encompass no more than 80 pages. Literature there should be indicated using brackets inside the text like [Papert 1976, 6-7].