

# **Projects and Project Outlines**

## **CPSC 532L**

February 28, 2013

# Our focus today: writing & argumentation

*“What most professionals do is research, think, and make arguments.*

*(And part of the value of doing your own thinking and writing is that it makes you much better at evaluating the thinking and writing of others.)”*

*from “Writing in College,”  
Williams and McEnerney,  
University of Chicago Writing Program*

# Picking a project topic

- Pick a topic related to something covered in class, but going beyond the exact topics we studied
  - course text and supplemental texts (AGT, Osborne & Rubenstein)
  - conferences (AAAI, IJCAI, ACM-EC, AAMAS, ...)
- For full credit, do a survey paper
  - survey 2-4 different approaches from the literature
  - you still need to have an *opinion*
    - describe strengths and weaknesses of different approaches
    - argue for your favorite and against others
    - synthesize ideas from different places
  - I encourage you to work in pairs
- For more than full credit, do some original research
  - a good idea if you hope to do ongoing research in the area
  - may dovetail with a project you've already started
  - you'll probably want to work alone

# Determining a thesis: generating ideas

- You need to start by reading
  - Consider more than one topic to make sure you pick a good one
  - Worst to be stuck with a project that doesn't interest you!
  - Don't read the whole paper carefully—look for the main ideas
- Come up with a thesis by letting ideas flow uncritically
  - freewriting
    - write without pausing, ignore grammar, set time limit
  - brainstorming
    - point form version of freewriting; again, don't be critical
  - clustering
    - organize ideas visually

# Finalizing your thesis

- easy to state in one sentence
- something you're passionate about and want to argue for
- Some tips:
  - make sure your thesis is narrow enough
  - make sure it's non-obvious
  - make sure it makes a claim rather than just stating a topic
  - make sure you don't miss a better topic by choosing too early
  - make sure you pick something you're interested in and have arguments about

# Outline your argument

- a simple point-form summary of what you want to say
  - this is the place to wrestle with how your argument will go, before you start getting caught up in sentences/details
- high level:
  - start by stating your thesis/main claim
  - give background information you need to cover
  - make two or three arguments to support your thesis
  - anticipate arguments against your thesis and respond to them
    - this doesn't weaken your argument—it strengthens it
  - conclude: sum up, tell us what it all means
- Once you've settled the high level, work out the arguments in favor in more detail
- Someone who reads your outline wouldn't be surprised by anything in the essay

# Today's Class

- Your project outlines are due Thursday March 7, 3 PM
- Today we'll work on your outlines
  - if you've read up on topics, start working on a real outline
  - if not, dream something up that seems plausible to you
- Talk with your partner and with others sitting around you
- When you think you've come up with a sensible outline, write it on the whiteboard
- When we have several written down, we'll critique them together