A Panorama of Publication Pitfalls
SFU

Tamara Munzner, UBC

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Overview

- What Not To Do
- What To Do
Paper Pitfalls: Strategy

- What I Did Over My Summer Vacation
  - focus on effort not contribution
  - too low-level

- Least Publishable Unit
  - tiny increment beyond (your) previous work
  - bonus points: new name for old technique

- Dense As Plutonium
  - so much content that no room to explain why/what/how
  - fails reproducability test

- Bad Slice and Dice
  - two papers split up wrong
  - neither is standalone, yet both repeat

- Slimy Simultaneous Submission
  - often detected when same reviewer for both
  - instant dual rejection, multi-conference blacklist
Paper Pitfalls: Tactics

- **Guess My Contributions Game**
  - it’s your job to tell reader explicitly
  - consider carefully, often different from original goals

- **I Am So Unique**
  - don’t ignore previous work
  - both on similar problems and with similar solutions

- **Enumeration Without Justification**
  - “X did Y” not enough
  - must say why previous work doesn’t solve your problem!
  - what limitations of theirs does your approach fix?

- **Deadly Detail Dump**
  - how allowed only after what and why
  - motivation: why should I care
  - overview: what did you do
  - details: how did you do it

- **Jargon Attack**
  - avoid where you can
  - define before using
Review Reading Pitfalls

- Reviewers Were Idiots
  - rare: insufficient background to judge worth
  - if reviewer didn’t get point, many readers won’t
  - rewrite so clearly that nobody can misunderstand

- Reviewers Were Threatened By My Brilliance
  - seldom: unduly harsh since intimately familiar area

- I Just Know Person X Wrote This Review
  - sometimes true, sometimes false
  - don’t get fixated, try not to take it personally

- Ignore Review and Resubmit Unchanged
  - often will get same reviewer, who will be irritated

- It’s The Writing Not The Work
  - sometimes true: bad writing can doom good work
    - converse: good writing may save borderline work
  - sometimes false: weak work all too common
    - many people reinvent wheel
    - some people make worse wheels than previous ones
Talk Pitfalls

- Results As Dessert
  - don’t save for end as reward for the stalwart
  - showcase early to motivate

- A Thousand Words, No Pictures
  - aggressively replace words with illustrations
  - most slides should have a picture

- Full Coverage Or Bust
  - cannot fit all details from paper
  - talk as advertising, communicate big picture
Review Writing Pitfalls

- Uncalibrated Dismay
  - remember you’ve mostly read the best of the best!
  - most new reviewers are overly harsh

- It’s Been Done, Full Stop
  - you must say who did it in which paper
  - providing full citation is best

- You Didn’t Cite Me
  - stop and think whether it’s appropriate
  - be calm, not petulant

- You Didn’t Channel Me
  - don’t compare against the paper you would have written
  - review the paper they submitted
Overview

▶ What Not To Do

▶ What To Do
Paper Structure: General

- **low level**: necessary but not sufficient
  - correct grammar/spelling
  - sentence flow

- **medium level**: order of explanations
  - build up ideas

- **high through low level**: why/what before how
  - paper level
  - section level
  - sometimes even subsection or paragraph
Paper Writing: Contributions

- what are your research contributions?
  - what can we do that wasn’t possible before?
  - how can we do something better than before?
  - what do we know that was unknown or unclear before?

- determines everything
  - from high-level message to which details

- often not obvious
  - diverged from original goals, in retrospect

- state them explicitly and clearly in introduction
  - don’t hope that reviewer or reader will fill in for you
  - don’t leave unsaid what should be obvious after close reading of previous work
    - pw very important - but many readers skip
  - goal is clarity, not overselling
    - do include limitations: often later, in discussion subsection
Three Suggestions

► write and give talk first
► **then** create paper outline from talk
  ► encourages concise explanations of critical ideas
  ► avoids wordsmithing ratholes and digressions

► practice talk feedback session: at least 3x talk length
  ► global comments, then slide by slide detailed discussion
  ► nurture culture of internal critique

► have nonauthors read paper before submitting
  ► internal review can catch many problems
  ► ideally group feedback session as above