# A Panorama of Publication Pitfalls

## Publishing Your Visualization Research

Visualization/VAST Doctoral Colloquium Panel

Tamara Munzner, UBC

2 November 2006

## Preface

- many good sources of generic advice
  - writing: syntax, spelling, and style
  - public speaking: presentations without panic
  - follow them!
- my focus: pitfalls more specific to our field

## 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 Contribution 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

## Talk Pitfalls

- Results As Dessert
  - don't save till 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 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

## Two Nonstandard 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