

The Role of Readings

You will find the readings in this class different from most of the readings you have encountered in other computer science classes. Rather than relying on textbooks (as we typically use in our mid-level and upper-level courses) or on tutorial notes (as we typically use in our introductory courses), this course relies on readings from “the literature”. You will read works written by computer scientists for computer scientists.

In part, we are working from the primary literature because I have found that no textbook covers the material I like in the course. However, the main reason to work from the literature is that I want you to learn how to read these kinds of papers. Among other things, in order to read many of these papers, you’ll need to take the time to consider code closely and to unpack mathematics.

For each reading you do, *I expect you to send me a one paragraph reflection on the reading by 8:00 p.m. the night before we are scheduled to discuss the reading in class.* Your reflection should show me that you have read the material and that you have thought about it carefully. I will use your questions to help structure the next class session. I will also post your questions (and, often, my answers) on the course Web site.

You may also ask for an explanation of a more complex part of the reading. I will use your responses, in part, as I plan each class sessions.

I grade each reflection on a simple scale. Most reflections get a check. Particularly insightful reflections (or excellent questions) get a plus. Reflections that illustrate little effort get a minus. Missing reflections get a 0. A student who receives mostly checks will get a B for this component of the course.

FAQ

Did you observe particular problems in how last year’s class reflected on readings?

Last year’s class was surprisingly reluctant to actually read sample code or math that appeared in papers. *Please take the time to try to understand the code and math that authors include. These parts of a paper often contain the key points.* It’s also good experience to learn to read math and code.

I don’t understand part of the reading. Can I ask a question rather than making a comment?

Certainly. However, it has to be a genuine question and not one that you should be able to answer with a bit of your own effort.

I see that you’re posting our names and your evaluation of our answers on each reading page. I’d prefer not to have my name and grade available that way.

Just let me know, and I’ll remove your name and keep track separately.

When you assign more than one reading, do I have to submit more than one paragraph?

Yes. One paragraph per reading.

When you assign the same reading for multiple days, do I have to submit additional questions for the second day (and third day and ...)?

Unless I tell you otherwise, you do not need to submit additional questions. In some case, I assign

different parts of readings on different days. In those cases, you will need to submit a different question each day.

What kinds of comments might we make, particularly on the more factual readings?

“I found it surprising that In my experience,”

“*The author discussess, which seems similar to the concept ... that I learned about in Then discuss similarities and differences.*”

“The example ... was quite subtle. I appreciated how it illustrated”

“I think the claim that is wrong because” (use this one sparingly)