1 Syllabus overview

Classes will meet during 2s, with x-hours used as necessary. Professor Cormen’s office hours are Mondays from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon and Thursdays from 10:00 am to 11:30 am. The course will use the scribe notes method. Each student must take a turn taking notes for the class, then type up them up cleanly in \LaTeX and submit the .tex file to Tom. The grade will be a weighted average of homework, the paper, a presentation, and participation. The paper will include a required first draft, which will be graded to ensure that the students take it seriously. The paper may be on any technical topic. It can be drawn from original work for a thesis or other classwork, or it can be a survey or review paper. The talk will be a technical CS talk and presented as if the speaker were the author. It will be conference length, about 20 minutes, and include slides. Slides will not contain walls of text. Four of the books are required: Dupré, Williams, Zobel, and Lamport; the rest are recommended.

2 Why teach this class?

There is a noticeable lack of writing skill throughout the discipline of computer science, from an undergraduate level all the way up through senior faculty. This lack of skill exists in both academia and industry, and it occurs independently of the speaker’s native language. Native English speakers are just as guilty—and sometimes more—of producing poor writing. Communication skills are required to succeed in the field; if a paper is published, but no one reads it, did the research really happen? Work is evaluated by the impact it makes in the field, and good writing is necessary to maximize the size of the audience and the level of impact. Writing provides a route to success that may not be dependent on novel research. CLRS is the second-most cited text in computer science, and a paper by Charles Leiserson beat out a paper by Les Valiant on the same subject due to its superior and more accessible writing. By acquiring good writing skills, you will appreciate quality papers among a sea of poorly written ones. Finally, Tom hopes to create a cadre of good writers that will leave Dartmouth and carry on his legacy.

3 Course organization

The course will be divided into four parts of unequal length. The first will be on writing, covering the organization of broad ideas within papers and the structure of individual sentences and paragraphs. This section will not dive into excessive detail on grammatical structures such as the subordinate clause. Students will work to develop an appreciative ear for grammar and style. The second section will be on presenting, and students will both give and critique talks. Time will be spent on brief (10–15 minute) talks, conference length (20–30 minute) talks, colloquia (45–60 minute) talks, and job talks. Early advice includes working on omitting “um”s. The third section will be brief, discussing the evaluation of papers and the academic
review process. The fourth section will cover production, dealing with proper \LaTeX{} usage, spacing, and figure placement. The philosophy of this section will be that typesetting should be like officiating—the good stuff goes unnoticed, but when it’s bad, it’s painfully obvious. There will be a typesetting homework, and Tom encourages the students to do as he says, not as he does. Violations of the rules established in the class do not invalidate the rules; sometimes there are good reasons, sometimes a mistake was made, and sometimes the rule was not made until after the writing of the violation.

4 Miscellanea

Tom hopes that students will learn to question the style choices they make, especially the use of passive voice. The biggest sin a student can make in Tom’s class is not checking their bibliography. Tom also hopes to impress upon the students the evils of prepositions.

The use of “et al.” at the end of a sentence does not require an extra period. A stop (period, question mark, or exclamation point) after a capital letter or parenthesis and capital letter is not treated as an end of a sentence by \LaTeX{}, though a stop after a lowercase letter is.