

# Writing and reviewing (one of three presentations)

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Brownbag 2010  
joint with Thorsten Joachims and Christoph Koch

# Why is writing important?

It's not just about getting your papers accepted ...

... it's about getting them read.

## Writers on writing

Writing is easy: All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.

— Gene Fowler

You spend the morning, and suddenly there are seven or eight words in a row.

They've got that twist, a little trip, that delights you. And you hope they will delight someone else.

And you could not have foreseen it, that little row.

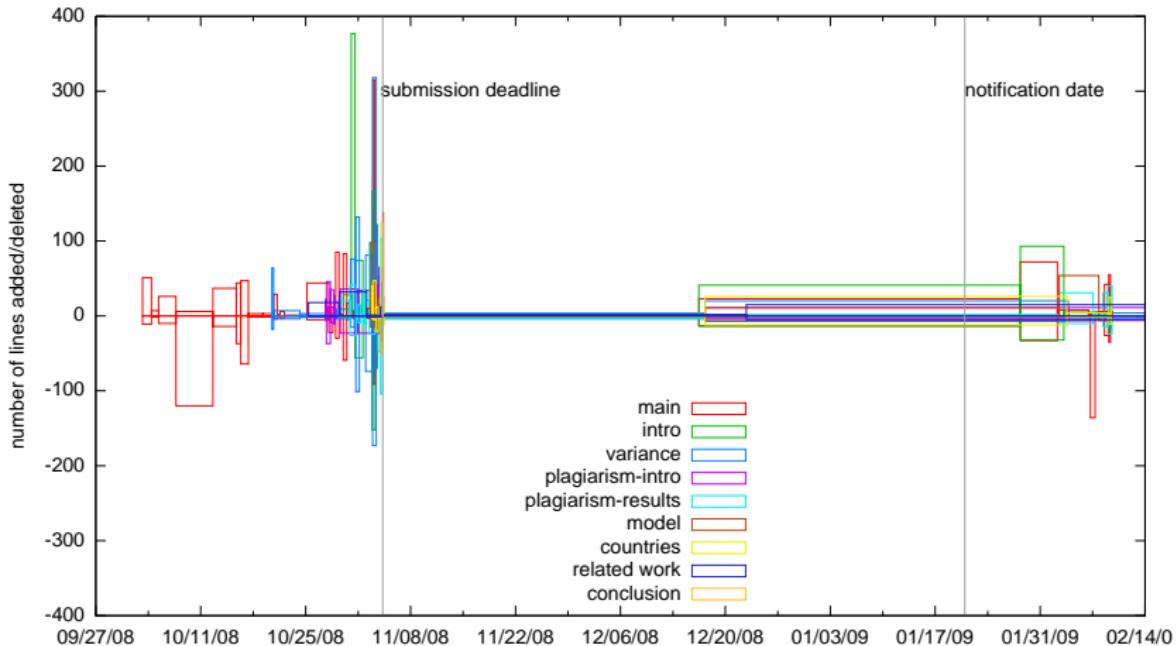
They often come when you're fiddling around with something that's already there. You see that by reversing a word order or taking something out, suddenly it tightens into what it was always meant to be.

— Ian McEwan, *New Yorker* interview

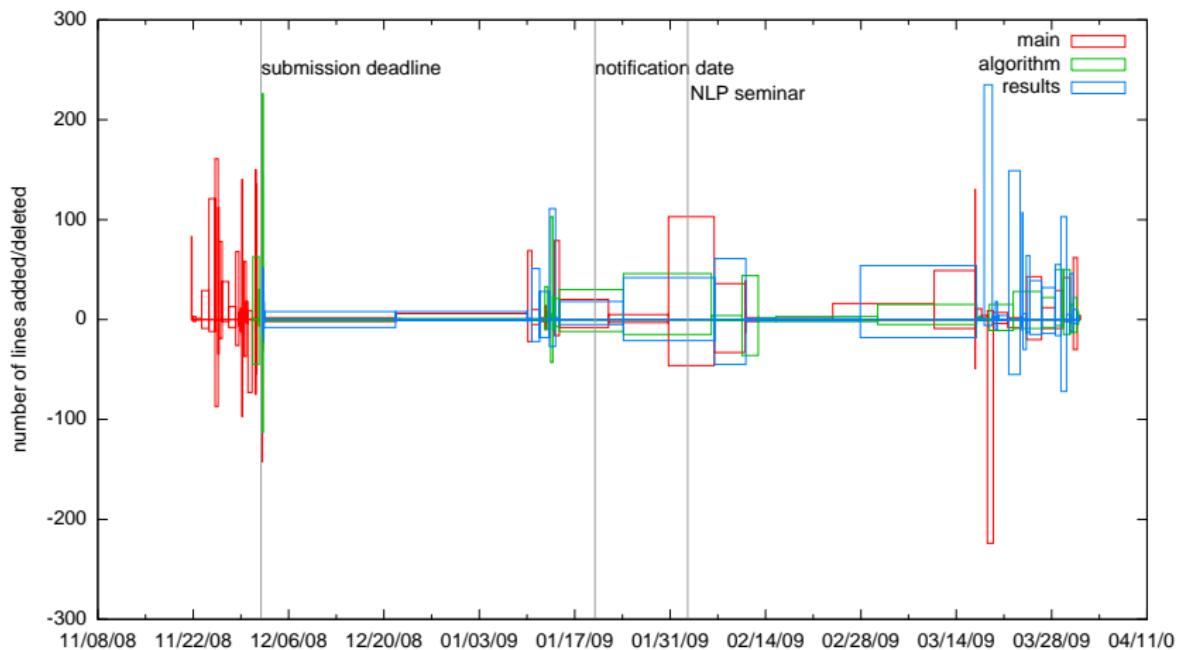
## The biggies

- ▶ Start early. (Yeah.)
- ▶ Revise often, based on as much feedback as possible.
- ▶ Outline and sometimes micro-outline: for each section/paragraph/sentence, figure out “what is the point I want to get across?”
  - ▶ Writing, like programming, is a form of problem-solving.

CVS change logs for WWW'09 (submissions: Nov 3; notification: Jan 20)



CVS logs for NAACL '09 (submissions: Dec 1; notification: Jan 19; NLP seminar Feb 2)



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### **Outside feedback is crucial.**

In the NLP seminar, we will discuss someone's current draft — where someone *other than the author(s)* leads the discussion.

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Make the case that your work is important up front. At the outset, everyone else in the world cares less about your work than you do.

Think of objections before your readers do, and defend accordingly. You can be creative here.

[example: paper with intro “overview”, “why this isn’t obvious”, “contributions” subsections:

<http://www.cs.cornell.edu/home/llee/papers/clue.pdf> ]

[example: paper with “FAQ” discussion section:

<http://www.cs.cornell.edu/home/llee/papers/pang-lee-stars.pdf>]

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Every bit of feedback, no matter how clueless you think it is at first, is a gift the reviewers have given you without recompense.

A reviewer missed “the obvious”? Then so could 1/3 of your hoped-for readership. Grit your teeth and make it clearer, increase the font, whatever it takes.

## On writing reviews

You have two equally important audiences: the authors and the program chairs (or area chairs, or action editors). Write for both of them.<sup>1</sup>

1. Your review should start by describing the 1-2 main strengths and weaknesses. Make it clear whether or not the community should see this work, even if imperfect.
2. Use your “aspect” (novelty, clarity, technical soundness) scores and impressions, *not* the number of criticisms you had, to guide your overall decision and your review write-up.
3. For a paper you really didn’t get, write down what you *did* understand.

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<sup>1</sup>You should make confidential comments to the PC in certain cases.

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## Other comments on reviewing

Search for related work. You'll learn more, so reviewing will be more worthwhile. ((Self-)plagiarism can also be an issue.)

Always be polite but thorough: conference software often reveals your identity to the other reviewers.