

CS 4100, Spring 2012

Final Project

Modified version of R. L. Zarling's Spring 2005, CS 4100, "Final Projects", used with permission.

Important Dates (details are discussed below):

Friday	February 17	Topic Proposal
Wednesday	March 14	Presentation of Topic
Monday	April 23	Peer Reviews of Complete Draft
Friday	May 18	Final Revision

Introduction

As a unifying and enriching exercise in applying what you have learned in this course, you will write a term paper about some aspect of languages and computers. This will involve reading and assimilating material beyond what we cover in class, and presenting it in a carefully written essay. The essay must be word-processed in a pleasantly readable format. Select a topic that can be handled well in about ten pages with a carefully organized and incisively articulated presentation.

It is important that you adhere to the style of scientific academic writing (see separate handout). It must, of course, be entirely your own work. In particular, cut-and-paste from web pages is generally prohibited, except for infrequent, short quotes which are fully attributed with credit to the source. The technical level of your paper should be understandable to your fellow students in the class; i.e. students with a computer science background, but not necessarily knowledgeable in the particular area you have chosen as a topic.

Choosing a Topic

Your choice of topic will be of considerable importance to the success of your project, so choose carefully and thoughtfully. Make it something that engages your interest and curiosity. It must also be something about which enough has been written that you can access multiple sources with differing viewpoints in order to synthesize your own position. However, you must also be careful not to choose too broad a topic which spans too much intellectual territory. For instance, normally you should not try to analyze or describe a complete programming language, as the number of relevant issues would be overwhelming. Writing about one particular interesting feature of a particular language might be acceptable, however, if you can address alternative approaches that might have addressed the same issues and what the relative merits of the various possibilities are.

Your topic needs to deal in some way with languages and computers, and needs to go significantly beyond material we address in class. Although you may eventually impose your own emphases, organization, and impressions, it should not be primarily your own opinions, but rather a fact-based reporting of some issue. Most good topics will include some complexity in terms of alternative approaches or viewpoints which might lead to different choices under different circumstances, or which have been handled in different ways in the past.

Some of you may already have an idea about a suitably narrow topic that you would like to learn more about, in which case you need only find the sources you will need. If, on the other hand, your imagination could use some prompting, you might begin by considering some of the exercises in our textbook (particularly those marked with asterisks), or reading some of the works

cited in the text's bibliography. You could also browse through articles and books in the library for awhile, noting where material relating to a couple of interesting topics may be found. In any case, when you find something that looks promising, you would focus your search more narrowly, for instance by following up on the list of references, looking for more related material.

Resources

You will need to use a number of sources in order to fully understand your topic. Our library has many general computer science books and journals which frequently contain contributions about languages, as well as those devoted specifically to programming languages. You may simply browse the periodical shelves, but you may also find it more efficient to use the electronic catalog system to quickly scan multiple journals. You might look through *Computing Reviews*, a periodical dedicated to short summaries of current literature from a variety of sources. The internet is also a rich source of inspiration and information. Your paper must be based at least in significant part on printed sources other than our textbook, however, and not merely internet research. Wikipedia will not be considered an acceptable primary source.

Keep careful records of where you find your information, and document the sources in your paper using APA documentation style (see <http://library.csustan.edu/guides/apa.htm>). It is possible that this may change to better conform to ACM Journal Style. Additional resources will be provided.

Schedule

Select a Topic

No two students may work on exactly the same topic. Initiate a "claim" to a topic by emailing me briefly supplying a working title and describing your proposed topic, including which issues you intend to address and emphasize and what you intend to leave out and why, and including a tentative list of sources. Your claim will be finalized when I approve your proposal; I may ask you for one or more revisions along the way. Topics will be assigned on a first-come-first-served basis. Hand in your topic proposal no later than **Friday, February 17th**.

Gather and Organize Information

Research your sources, gather and organize your material, and come to class on **Wednesday, March 14th**, ready to present to the class a brief, tentative overview of the content and organization of your paper. This will allow your classmates to see what you are doing and you can benefit from their collective reactions and suggestions. You may present a slideshow or an outline projected from the front of the classroom. Turn in a printed copy of your overview to me at that time.

Complete the Paper for Peer Review

Bring a complete draft of your paper to class on **Monday, April 23rd**, which will be a peer review session to help you in your final revisions. Two classmates will read it and make written suggestions. Turn in your draft to me at the end of the class period. You will turn in the peer reviews later attached to your final paper.

Reflect and Revise

Read the peer reviews of your paper and reflect on the points raised. You may choose to incorporate the suggestions or not, but you should do so with an eye to producing the strongest possible final paper. Write a one- or two-page reaction paper, which addresses the issues raised

and indicates, in each case, what if any revisions you will make and why. You will turn in this reaction paper along with your final paper.

Final Revision

- No later than **2:00 pm** on **Friday, May 18th**, turn in all of the following:
- A final revision of your paper in both printed and electronic form (use submission system)
 - Two (or more) peer reviews of your paper
 - Your written reaction to the reviews as described above

Grading

The grade for your project will be based on measures of progress, timeliness and participation at the intermediate milestones of the writing process listed above, on the quality of the reviews and reaction paper you write in the peer review process, and on holistic readings of the papers you turn in at the end of the semester, both before and after the peer review. In these final readings I will react to your paper based on the depth and accuracy of what you have to say and the skill you have exhibited in presenting it. Factors like organization, choice of wording, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure will play an indirect role. I will look for papers that present important, accurate and well balanced information in a focused and engaging way.

Plagiarism

The Random House College Dictionary (1984 edition) defines plagiarism as “the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work.” You may not use another person’s words or organization of ideas from written, verbal, or electronic sources, paraphrased or directly, copyrighted or not, except in limited quantity with attribution. The final grading process will include checking for plagiarism, with severe penalties for violations of this ethic. Many of these issues have been discussed in class over the course of the term. If you have questions about how to handle some specific aspect of using someone else’s words, ideas, or organization in your paper, consult with me well in advance of the due date.