

CIS400/401 Final Report Specification*

Dept. of CIS - Senior Design 2014-2015[†]

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ABSTRACT

Your final report is the culmination of your work over the prior year. It will likely be similar to your progress report, with your system description refined where necessary and a far improved “results” section. However, the report should be more formal than previous editions and assume that a reader has no prior knowledge of your project.

This document sets the required parameters for the final report. Content of the previous specifications remains relevant and should be referenced when authoring. An updated set of “writing guidelines” has also been posted which addresses common issues seen in the progress reports. We strongly advise you heed the advice of that document.

1. REPORT PARAMETERS

Final reports can be up to 12 pages in length. This page total does not include references. An unlimited quantity/length of appendices may also be included, but this should not be a dumping place for core project content.

Admittedly, this page requirement is not a large one. However, what content you provide will be graded stringently. We prefer you concentrate on writing a succinct, well-written report rather than a poorly written longer one. Your novel contributions and results are most significant, so if space is at a premium, sections like “related work” are most apt for tightening. **Do not plagiarize.**

2. REPORT FORMAT

The “Introduction → Background → Related Work → System Model → System Implementation → Results → Future Work → Conclusions” format is a typical one for systems papers. However, do not be afraid to break from this as your project may require.

3. INCREASED FORMALITY

Students should tell a research-focused story, not a personal one. Notice that the final report does not ask for you to assess how much of your anticipated goal was completed or reflect on your difficulties. Keep it as impersonal as possible. Tasks that remain uncompleted may fall under “Future Work”, but keep this section focused on large research questions, not trivial features of your system.

*For this report, we do **not** need a signed hard-copy. Electronic submission is sufficient: Submit **only** via Dropbox, please do **not** email copies to the professor or TAs.

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Assume a researcher has found your paper on the Internet. What would he/she care about? They would not care about your prior reports, nor the fact you had never used Ruby and had to learn it. Instead, they would care about: (1) what you have done, (2) motivations of why you did it, (3) why it is better than what already exists, (4) how you did it, and (5) how effective it was. Keep your discussion focused along these themes.

Along these lines, avoid references to “this project.” Do not reference your previous writings (*e.g.*, “as we mentioned in our proposal”). The researcher who finds your paper on the Internet is not aware of – and does not care about – these things. Write for an anonymous audience and in a style like you would submit this paper to a conference/journal. Final reports will be publicly posted.

4. ETHICS

Your final report must contain a short (1-3 paragraph) section concerning ethics. Immediately preceding the “conclusion” section is probably a good place, unless your project dictates another location (*e.g.*, if your data collection had ethical issues, discuss them adjacent to that).

In most cases, this discussion will not be about actual ethical issues encountered but instead on *imagining* ethical issues that could arise as a result of your product/system. Imagine you are wildly successful and tons of people are using your service. What could go wrong? How could customers or others get hurt (physically, economically, mentally)? As always, try to concentrate on novel issues that your system introduces; the fact your back-end database could be hacked is not a novel issue. Even if you have not actually addressed these concerns in your implementation, you should speculate about how these concerns could be mitigated. As this is primarily hypothetical discussion, try to keep it tight and focused. If you believe that your project is “risk-less” then you should justify that claim.

5. QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

Rather than listing common errors and suggestions here, we have aggregated them into a document posted adjacent to this specification on the course website. Following this advice is paramount to the success of your final report and your course grade.