

How to write a successful EuSpRIG paper

Say what you have learnt, why it is better, and show others how they can do it too.

Start by familiarizing yourself with previous EuSpRIG papers. Read through some conference papers; choose those that address issues that you relate to. Search for 'EuSpRIG' on Arxiv.org. If you decide to use references then refer to the papers in your text rather than simply listing them at the end with no clue as to why they are relevant. If you agree with an author, expand upon their work rather than simply repeating it, which adds no value. If you disagree, say why by providing counter examples.

Read the Call for Papers carefully to see what the hot topics are this year. People, Process, and Technology are always in fashion, but the emphasis changes.

The key to a successful practitioner paper is:

1. Place your presentation in context. What is appropriate to student exercises may not be so to corporate financial models, or large data analysis, or financial reporting, or routine office task automation.
2. Describe current user practice and its motivation.
3. Say what problems are associated with it. Problems arising from lack of knowledge of Excel features are of little interest because the solution is obvious.
4. At least, say how those problems can be detected so that users can check their own work in time before the spreadsheet is used to cause damage.
5. Even better, say how those problems can be prevented; you may need to distinguish your solution from alternatives.
6. Show how your approach both prevents those problems and (this will really get their attention) is little or no more costly than current practice or the alternatives.

Practitioners should not get hung up about academic standards and definitions. They are not necessary for respectability. Readers and attendees at our conference do not care about covering your assertions with definitions.

Don't get into a fight about terminology - if you use computer science jargon or software engineering buzzwords, you may irritate those who have established specific meanings for these terms, or confuse those who are accustomed to conventional meanings.

Read Strunk and White, Elements of Style. Again. Or Modern English usage by Fowler. If your native language is not English, please have your paper reviewed by a good writer of English, in order to remove barriers to comprehension by the reviewers. Writing that is awkward, foreign, misspelt, or unclear, will frustrate reviewers who then may simply give up the effort.

Prepare a presentation that illustrates the paper rather than lists bullet points that repeat the content. If you read out slides, you will bore attendees who may speed-read ahead in the proceedings and not listen to you further. Telling stories around the material, or demonstrating in Excel, will get attention rather than a repetition of what they can already read. Allow time for questions afterwards. Expect to be challenged, and enjoy the debate.

www.usenix.org/events/samples/submit/advice.html

These thirty-odd questions can help you write a better technical paper. Consult them often as you organize your presentation, write your first draft, and refine your manuscript into its final form. Some of these questions address specific problems in "systems" papers; others apply to technical papers in general. Writing a good paper is hard work, but you will be rewarded by a broader distribution and greater understanding of your ideas within the community of journal and proceedings readers.

www.cs.colorado.edu/~grudic/teaching/CSCI4202_2005/How%20to%20write%20a%20Paper%20or%20Presentation.pdf

How to write a Journal/Conference Paper (Greg Grudic's sure fire recipe ☺)

Part 1: Specify what problem (topic) is being addressed.

Part 2: What is the current state of the art of solutions?

Part 3: What is the proposed solution?

Part 4: Discussion: How does the proposed solution compare with others? In theory? In practice? What are the weaknesses?

Part 5: Conclusion. Summarise. Identify open questions.

<http://pdos.csail.mit.edu/scigen/>

A less serious approach!

www.jobs.ac.uk/careers/tips/556/Top_Ten_Tips_for_giving_a_conference_paper

Top Ten Tips for giving a conference paper

<http://www.chi2005.org/cfp/guide.html>

Guide to Successful Submissions (a serious read)

From Bill Stewart (Slashdot, May 7, 2006), edited

Write like a newspaper reporter, not a grad student.

Your objective is clear communication to the reader, not beauty or eruditeness or narration of your discoveries and reasoning process. Don't waste their time, or at least don't waste it up front.

Hit the important conclusions in the first few sentences so your reader will read them. If you'd like to wrap up with them at the end of your memo, that's fine too, in case anybody's still reading by then, but conclusions come first.

If you're trying to express something complex, simplify your writing so it doesn't get in the way. For something simple, 10th grade language structures will do, but if it's really hairy stuff, back down to 8th grade or so.

Think about what your audience knows and doesn't know, and what they want and don't want. Express things in terms of what they know and want, not what you know.

<http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/um/people/simonpj/papers/giving-a-talk/giving-a-talk.htm>

“Writing papers, giving research talks, and writing research proposals are key skills, but they aren't easy. This page describes how I approach each of these three challenges, in the hope that they may be useful to you. “

<http://www.cse.psu.edu/~yuanxie/advice.htm>

LOTS of links. More than you want.

Patrick O'Beirne

www.eusprig.org