

Class Evaluations of Research Papers

(Original version written by Norman Ramsey; Edited by Kathleen Fisher)

Introduction

In this class, we will regularly strive to reach a shared understanding of the ideas presented in research papers. This document describes the process we will use to try to reach consensus.

Small-group work

1. *Divide into groups.* For each paper, we will form new groups of 3-4 students each. To the extent possible, we will make these groups diverse, so that each group contains
 - People with different degrees of experience
 - People with experience using different languages
 - People with interests in different research areas
2. *Choose a recorder.* Once the groups have been formed, *introduce yourselves* and then select one person to *record* the views expressed in the group, including
 - Decisions the group makes collaboratively
 - Significant dissent

The recorder will speak for the group. Everyone will serve as a recorder during the term.
3. *Discuss possible answers to the questions.* Use the whiteboard, a computer, or whatever else you need. This is a “brainstorming” phase. Don’t stop with a single answer; *look at things from all angles.*
4. *Reach consensus on the most satisfying answers.* Perhaps the group will agree on answers that satisfy everyone. Perhaps there will be significant dissent—maybe even no majority view.
5. *Prepare to report to the class as a whole.* Your report should cover the following points:
 - The preferred answers according to the consensus reached by your group.
 - The *reasons* that you prefer these answers. Focus on *concrete properties* that you can point to.
 - Any significant minority views.
 - A few words about answers that your group considered but ultimately rejected.

The plenary session

1. *Recorders from individual groups present their groups’ conclusions.* We’ll write down these conclusions on the whiteboard.
2. *Class discussion and class consensus.* We’ll discuss and evaluate the groups’ conclusions. We’ll try to forge a coherent consensus view that the whole class can agree on, but also be alert for gaps, inconsistencies, and incoherence.
3. *Comparison with professional consensus.* When possible, I’ll compare the conclusions reached by the class with my interpretation of the consensus position of the body of researchers interested in functional programming.

A permanent record

The recorders will be responsible for writing a summary of the class conclusions. I will post to the course website. These paragraphs will form an “annotated bibliography” of the papers we read in the class. Summaries will be due no later than one week after the class in which we finish discussing a particular paper.