

Requirements for write-ups on readings

Your goal in a “write-up” on a course reading is to show that you have read the paper in sufficient detail to (1) understand its major contribution(s) and other important aspects, and/or (2) develop thoughtful clarification and/or discussion questions, and/or (3) attack or defend the paper’s merits or utility to the community.

General requirements: Your write-up should be typed, using 12-point font and 1.5-line spacing; it should fit on one side of a piece of paper. Submit one copy on CDF sufficiently before the beginning of class, and keep a copy for yourself, e.g., on your device or on paper, to use during the class discussion of the reading. It should have three, delineated parts:

1. The first part of your write-up should be a brief description of the main idea and contribution of the paper. Discuss some of the following: some of the salient aspects of the approach and methods, some of the strengths or weaknesses of the work, a comparison to ideas we’ve discussed in class or other papers we’ve read, etc.

This part of the write-up should be brief, **no more than 200 words** (around half a page), so you will have to be very focused in making your points. Do **not** simply re-word the abstract given by the author; your goal is to convince us that you’ve read the paper. Do **not** use text directly from the paper; you don’t have space for quotations in 200 words.

2. Provide a list of 3 to 5 questions that you would like to have answered or discussed about the paper. List each question separately in a numbered list. These can be straightforward clarification questions about aspects of the paper that you didn’t completely understand, or more discussion-oriented questions concerning other aspects. Questions can also relate between the paper and other ideas you have encountered in our outside the class.

You’ll need a copy of your write-up during class, so that you can refer to these questions. You are expected to participate in the discussion by asking questions of clarification and/or expansion of the material, so having these questions formulated will help.

3. For each paper, you will be randomly assigned to a **for** group or an **against** group. Attempts will be made to keep these groups balanced, but you can request to switch groups if you wish. During the discussion of the paper in class, individuals in the **against** group will criticize the paper with one or two points of contention; the **for** group then responds to those points and may offer other points of praise or defense of the paper in return. These points of contention should focus on scientific aspects of the paper (e.g., empirical methodology, justification of claims, impact of results) and not other aspects (e.g., writing style, unless relevant to scientific considerations). This is meant to foster debate in class of the type often encountered in academia.