

Assignment 9 — Resources for PhD

Yingdan Huang

I. Comment on "How to give a good research talk"

Generally speaking, the paper is concise and useful except for that I feel people don't use overhead projector so much these days. One thing I learnt from this paper is about timing. I didn't realize over-run is selfish and rude. With the two words like those, I will be very careful about it.

I took a class called "Professional Speaking" before. This paper covers most important points I knew, but there are some differences. For example, my previous instructor asked us to put an outline slide right after the title slide. Both ways make some senses to me. I think format is flexible and should be determined by the effectiveness of a talk.

II. Comment/Criticism for "Gerhard's Advice for PhD Students"

I see a big to-do list in the first 3 pages, which reminds me of those unproductive days and missed deadlines. When it comes to "What is a Ph.D. all about" in page 4, I find I basically agree with the 3rd statement and strongly disagree on the 1st one:

1. It qualifies you for the rest of your life
3. It should motivate you "to work hard not because you have to – but because you want to!"

When we assessed Ivan Sutherland's PhD thesis, we didn't have enough time to finish our presentation. Actually, I tried to use his words "I just need to figure out how things work" to answer the question "why do we pursue PhD study" put forward at the beginning of this class. To me, Sutherland's words share the same idea with the 3rd statement and are actually better, for that "have to" and "want to" are not necessarily conflicted. People have different levels of needs (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs) so that I can say "I have to since I want to". People surely have different purposes about PhD study too. I notice many students have PhD mania and work frantically because they would like to be called "Dr." or their families really want them to get this degree. So my answer is only my preference.

Can PhD qualify someone for the rest of his/her life? I sincerely hope so because I am right on this track now. Because the word "life" is too big, I assume the author means "academic life" to make my argument shorter. However, I'll still say "no" to this modified declaration. The first reason is that I believe in academic world, work or contribution is more important than a PhD degree – that is why we know many people are active in academia without a PhD.

The second reason is about the magic prediction of "the rest of the life". My father is a computer engineer and it was him who told me not to study for computer science when I was about to go to college. His reason is computer science changes too fast so that we have to keep learning new knowledge. And after we work for several years, it is very possible that we cannot compete with students who just graduate. I also notice that some professors stop being active after they get tenure positions. Imagine that on one hand, computer science updates fast; on another hand, a professor (assume he/she is a PhD) stops working hard, how can we say a PhD qualifies people for the rest of their lives? – Except that I have a different (wrong) understanding of "qualify".

The third reason of my disagreement is because of the several possible roles of a PhD. For example, some PhD will teach in a university. So he/she needs to teach, do research and possibly administration. Among these roles, a PhD degree qualifies a person with research ability and most of knowledge required for teaching. But for teaching, knowledge is not all – some of us might recall the teachers or professors who are knowledgeable but couldn't convey their knowledge, or couldn't manage a course well etc.

From above reasons and more, I think the 1st statement is not a very good guideline and it tends to make someone become arrogant.

III. Online Resources

- Digital libraries: e.g. ACM Digital Library, IEEE Electronic Library Online

When I try to develop my projects or write a paper, I need to check related work in these digital libraries. They give me lots of important guidance:

- 1) How to write a good paper?
 - I learn some formats and know of my favorite writing style.
- 2) What level of a project will be publishable?
 - I need to decide if it is time to write a paper about my work or there is still more work to be done for publication.
- 3) What have people got so far?
 - I cannot simply repeat others' work.
- 4) At the same time, I can gradually find my interested topics and valuable bibliography. And I hope I would figure out some landscapes of the chosen areas.

- Online bookstores: e.g. Amazon

I feel digital libraries are not enough. First, they are usually short and it limits them to discuss some important points at full length. Second, a paper might be a report of one project. I am not so experienced so that it is sometimes (maybe always) hard for me to see its meaning in a larger context. I found

books are very helpful to set up the overviews – while this resource is not really online.

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

It always provides me with answers to my puzzles, which may look small but very helpful.