

How to write a reading report

Your reading report should be at most one page, single spaced, with reasonable margins. It should have two main components:

1. A concise summary of the paper, providing an overview of what they actually did (and why), what methods they used, and what their results were.
2. A brief critique of the paper, giving a technical evaluation of the work, what things were unclear or not addressed, and the merits of the work. This should be a technical critique, not an “emotional critique”

These two components can (and sometimes should) be intertwined. Here are some guidelines for writing a reading report:

- In order to write a good reading report, you must have read the paper critically. (Think about the questions in the “How to read a research paper” handout.)
- Treat this as a piece of writing — write it on a computer so that you can edit easily and also for legibility.
- Use your understanding of the paper to write a cohesive summary rather than a “play by play” account of the paper.
- Be concise, but include some technical detail.
- The phrases “I would have liked to see...” and “I thought...” are not really relevant here. In the case of the former, say what you mean, e.g. “The results would be more convincing if...” As for the latter, I already know that the report contains your thoughts and opinions.
- When I read a reading report, I am looking to see whether you have understood the key points of the paper.
- Do not simply copy choice phrases from the paper; this does not demonstrate that you have understood the paper, and it is not good writing.
- Pretend that you’re writing this report for me, that I haven’t read the paper, and I’m very busy. (Some of these things aren’t pretend!) I am pretty knowledgeable about robotics, so you don’t need to go into detailed explanations, particularly not in the motivations for the work.

I estimate that it takes at least 3 hours to thoroughly read a conference paper and write a good reading report.