

CMSC 304
Ethics and Social Issues in Information Technology
Final Paper Guidelines
Issued: 3 April Due: 13 May

Paper Options

The final paper can take one of two forms: it can either be a deeper ethical analysis of a broad issue, or it can be a "book report" on a (serious, significant) book related to a topic in the course.

Extended Ethical Analysis. For the ethical analysis choice, you will select a topic, technology, or situation (e.g., one from those we covered in class or something else, but *not* the ones used in previous Ethical Analysis assignments), identify the issues or ethical questions in this area, and analyze the ethical, social, economic, and/or legal aspects of these issues. You should identify *at least* one ethical question where you will apply the ethical analysis framework on to analyze possible policies, identify stakeholders and consequences, and then draw and support a conclusion. (As this is a longer paper, you may want to include more detailed discussion on factors such as economic, legal, risk and uncertainty, resource distribution, and operational practicality if they pertain to your topic and/or proposed solution(s) to the situation.)

Since this is an extended analysis, you should go beyond that simple framework in two ways: *First*, you should look at the issues from **multiple angles** (for example, if you were to write an extended analysis of vulnerability selling, you might analyze the policies and issues from three (of several) perspectives: those of the vulnerability researchers/sellers, the technology companies, end-users, and policymakers). *Second*, you should also include *at least two specific cases* or incidents. For example, if you chose copyright and freedom of information, you might consider the cases of Aaron Swartz and the *Napster* case, discussing the ethical issues and how they have been interpreted in different contexts. Depending on the topic/issue covered, you might consider doing your analysis as a "compare-and-contrast" between them.

Book Report. For this option, you would (with approval) choose an important or notable book about a topic/issue that is relevant to the course (e.g., Cliff Stoll's "The Cuckoo's Egg" about computer espionage, or Eric Raymond's "The Cathedral & The Bazaar" about the open-source movement). Your book report should summarize and discuss the key themes and issues of the book, focusing on the social and ethical issues that are raised. While you do not need to use the ethical analysis step-by-step methodology, you may find it useful in identifying and discussing the relevant issues and ethical questions.

Length

The target length for the final paper is *approximately* 6-8 pages in double-spaced 11- or 12-point font. Some of you may be able to explore an interesting topic broadly and meaningfully in fewer pages; others will go into more depth or add more examples/details, and will write longer papers. However, if you submit a paper that is shorter than 5 pages or longer than 10 pages, you can expect that I will be looking with a very critical eye to see whether you have skimmed on your topic or written a bloated paper with extraneous material. Regardless: quality of analysis and presentation is more important than the quantity of words used!

Topic Paragraph

The topic statement (**due by the beginning of class on Tuesday 4/15**) is a short summary of your intended topic area (the topic, the main issues, and specific cases/incidents if you have identified some) or book (title, author, topic, some general explanation of why you chose it and how it is relevant for the class). The topic paragraph is just meant to be a single short paragraph, but of course, you are free to write more if so inspired.

Topic paragraphs should be submitted by email, in plain text (NOT as an attachment, google doc link, or anything else that I can't simply read in the body of the email).

Paper Organization

Since this is a somewhat longer paper, it should be organized into sections the way that a scientific paper or longer magazine article would be, with section titles (and subsections if appropriate) that help the reader to follow the flow of the paper and identify the main sections.

Because you are each choosing your own book or topic, and your own emphasis of issues and perspective, it isn't possible or desirable for us to give general guidance about organizing the paper. I *strongly* encourage you to use good "prewriting" habits, including identifying the main themes and ideas before you start writing, writing an outline before you write prose, and knowing what you want each paragraph to be about before you start writing it. Another good habit is to reread and edit your own material critically, multiple times, over a period of time. *You may want to conduct an informal peer-review within your groups, too.*

Draft Papers

If you want either John or I to (informally) read and comment on a draft of your work, we are happy to do so. However, it should be polished enough -- and you should feel confident enough about the contents, organization, and grammar -- that you feel that it *could* be a final draft. That means that you should ask us to review it at least a week before its due date so that you have time to revisit and revise it, polishing it into a solid paper. **Therefore, draft papers will not be reviewed after 5/6.** (Note that "read and comment on" does not translate into "pre-grading" your work.)

The final paper will be submitted both via e-mail (Word format) and in hard-copy by the start of class on 5/13.

References

Papers should include a set of references (material that you used as you were researching the topic and that has influenced what you wrote, whether or not you are citing it specifically as a source). Book reports do not require references, but you may end up doing some outside research on claims or issues discussed in the book, and in this case you should include the references used.

Be mindful of your sources! These include books, peer-reviewed technical articles in an academic journal, newspaper or magazine articles in an "establishment" publication (i.e., a professional print publication, not an online blog or open-source website), or professional organization website (such as the American Medical Association or the American Meteorological Society). Most of your sources should be these kinds of references, but you may also include what I would call "informal" sources in your references if you have used them for background or to help you research the topic. Examples of "informal" sources include company websites, informational sites like AAI Topics, or respectable blogs like TechDirt, TorrentFreak, or Blown to Bits. Do not include any "junk" sources like answers.yahoo.com, clearly unfiltered/stream-of-consciousness blogs, or obviously promotional/commercial websites. (Just ask if you have any questions about whether a source would be considered legitimate.)

Your bibliography should be neatly and consistently formatted, single-spaced (with blank lines between sources) using APA style.

Don't forget to consult Dr. Dj's Writing Guide (remember that?) for handy tips and recommendations on making sure your paper is as polished as possible -- but remember it is a resource and not something you need to follow specifically.

Academic Integrity

This should go without saying, but the paper itself, the draft, the topic statement, and anything else you turn in along the way must adhere to the academic honesty policy. All writing that you submit should be your own, other than clearly delineated quotes with proper references. (Heavy use of quotes very often reflects a lack of independent thinking, so you should use quotes judiciously and only when you need to capture exactly what another author said.)