Homework Assignment #3 – Peer Review and Reflective Essays

Due Dates:
  Peer review: Fri, May 13, before 10:00pm
  Reflective essays: Wed, May 18, before 10:00pm

1. Peer Review
a. Familiarize yourself with the purpose of doing peer reviews (attached).
b. Follow the link below to our peer reviewing tool in order to provide ratings and constructive feedback for every student on your team (at least). You will be able to return and edit your feedback and/or ratings at any time before the deadline; the students you provide reviews for will see only your latest feedback and ratings. Other specific instructions are provided in the tool itself.

Submission: http://abstract.cs.washington.edu/~valentin/PeerReview/peer_eval.cgi

Follow-up: Once everyone has submitted their peer reviews, we will announce how you may (a) see what others said for your work and (b) indicate whether you found their comments useful or not. The link for this part will be different and will be announced separately.

Note: We will not use your ratings and feedback for grading purposes. However, completing this part of the assignment is required.

2. Reflective Essays
a. Familiarize yourself with the purpose of doing reflective essays (attached).
b. Reflect on each of the following topics:

– Thinking about the days immediately before the preliminary release, what one or two situations related to your team's release delivery surprised you the most? Did those require action from you and/or your teammates? If so, was your involvement successful and why?

– Lecture 13 contained an analysis of two examples of software that were difficult to use. The analysis focused on how the software violated Norman's design rules from "Design of Everyday Things". (The rules are listed on the second slide of lecture 13.)
Describe an example of software that you personally find difficult to use. Analyze the difficulty of use – can you relate the difficulty to any of Norman's four rules? How would you make that software easier to use? (We suggest that you choose a very specific example, such as a dialog box that you have difficulty with, as opposed to a full program, such as Word. Showing a snapshot of a particular interaction you're describing may help to additionally clarify your point.)

– Consult the handout on Influence diagrams and look at the relevant slides with ink from quiz section 6. Sketch an influence diagram (different from those described in section and in the handout) that has at least 3 states and contains a positive feedback loop leading to an undesirable outcome. We suggest that you use this opportunity to illuminate an issue of interest to you personally; it does not need to be related to software. Briefly describe the issue in words too and discuss how one might "untie" the feedback loop specifically for the situation at hand (rather than in general).

Formatting:
- Use at most 2 pages of text total for all of your answers. Non-textual artifacts (e.g., images), if any, are limited to 1 additional page (embedded inside the same document).
- Format your document to be single-spaced, using font size 11 or larger.

- Save your work preferably in rich text format (RTF or DOC). We cannot edit (and add comments to) PDF without copying the contents over.

Things to remember:
- Name the file that contains your essay using the following convention:
  - *LastName*-cse403-essay-2.rtf, where *LastName* is replaced with your last name.
- Put your name in the header field of your essay document, not only in the filename.

Submission: via UW Catalyst's eSubmit tool:
   https://catalyst.washington.edu/webtools/secure/esubmit/turnin.cgi?owner=vrazmov&id=3015

Follow-up: As part of our feedback, we will pose a follow-up question or two, based on what you wrote. You will be expected to answer that in writing too, though we anticipate that the answer will take you less time to produce than the original writing did.

Peer Reviews

Peer reviews are a way of giving and receiving feedback about job-related performance. They are common in the technology industry today, typically performed at least once every 12 months.

Giving peer reviews forces you to assess how well your team is functioning, and may raise issues that need to be addressed by you and/or by your team. Receiving peer feedback helps you to see how your peers assess your work, which may illuminate areas you need to improve upon and/or areas where you are doing better than you thought.

There will be 2-3 peer reviews in this class, typically one after each milestone.

For each peer review, you need to rate the work of every student on your team (the rating scale is explained in the reviewing tool itself) and also to provide *constructive feedback* to them. You are welcome to rate and/or give feedback to anyone else in the class too, though this is not a required part. Your feedback will be anonymous to all students, but not to instructors. Also, you will only be able to see the ratings and feedback given for you, but not for other students in the class. (Note: We can ensure that your name is never displayed alongside with ratings and comments you provide, but your writing style may still give away who you are.)

After seeing the results of the review, you will have a chance to provide quick feedback to your reviewers on whether you found their feedback and/or ratings to be useful. This would allow everyone, by the end of the quarter, to learn to better gauge what constitutes useful feedback.

Reflective Essays

The goal of reflective essays is to:
    (a) get you to think more deeply about certain aspects of the course;
    (b) practice the skill of reflecting.

Reflecting upon your experience deepens your understanding of the domain, shows it in a different light, and helps you to generate new ideas and possibilities in that and other domains. Practicing reflection is important, since this skill is critical for becoming an expert in *any* domain – only by reflecting upon what happened can you learn from successes and mistakes.

Here are some techniques that will help you get the most from your reflections:
- Write in the first person about what happened to *you*, not to some abstract person.
- Write about things that are meaningful to *you* or happened to *you*. You will have more energy to dig into those topics.

Consider the following aspects as you reflect upon your experience:
- What stood out for you?
- What insights did it give you?
- What is *one* thing you will do differently as a result of what you learned?
- Use facts to ground your assertions.
- Do not confuse opinions with facts.

We are looking for stories about issues meaningful to you, communicated in a way that makes them meaningful to the reader (i.e., us).

Good essays have solid content, clear style, are grounded in factual assertions, and communicate well. Incidentally, good code has the same characteristics, so excellent software developers tend to also be excellent writers. In the end, writing code and writing a good essay are both about communicating effectively with your audience – an indispensable skill regardless of your domain of expertise.

In our experience, good essays often include one or more of the following aspects:
- Demonstrate how lessons from this course enabled you to do something that you were not able to do before. This may include noticing things that you had not noticed before.
- Illustrate how this course is (or is not) changing your beliefs and ideas of what is, or is not, possible for you.
- Discuss how you have used lessons from this course in other parts of your life, or vice versa.
- Analyze situations using tools learned in this course, and discuss how well those tools worked for you.
- Discuss a situation from multiple perspectives.