



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Cognitive Systems Program

2613 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

604-827-5468

www.cogsys.ubc.ca

Guidelines for preparing the COGS 401 Research Essays

COGS 401 is a writing intensive course, so we write a lot of papers: four research essays plus the research proposal. There are lots of reasons to learn how to write well and you have probably heard a fair number of them. Here are two reasons that mean a lot to us: writing is a powerful medium for communicating ideas whose complexity demands greater permanence of the expression than the 'here now, gone forever' nature of spoken communication. Putting something down on paper also radically shifts your grasp of what you think by slowing down your thinking, forcing it into a more stationary frame, and thus allowing you to critically examine the 'best' (many interpretations here) way to make your point. While writing may seem to be more natural to some people than others, good writing is hard work for everyone, and there seems to be no avoiding that fact.

The purpose of the research essays in COGS 401 is to continue the paradigm inculcated in COGS 200, continued in COGS 300, and hammered on in COGS 303. That is not to say that the desired format for research essays in COGS 401 is the same as what was sought in your previous courses. There are specific requirements for both **form** and **content**:

First, your commentaries should be written succinctly and clearly. You should begin with a **thesis statement** that tells the reader:

- **What you, the author(s)** of the commentary, are going to be talking about
- **Why you, the author(s)** of the commentary, want to talk about this
- **How you, the author(s)** of the commentary, intend to structure your discussion.

In terms of *content*, your research essays should be based on one or both of two paired topics presented by guest lecturers. The commentaries are **not** intended to be summaries of what someone else presented; they are also **not** intended to be critical laundry lists of everything you did or didn't like about a talk. Rather, the idea is to find something about a presented topic that interests you sufficiently to think about it further. This may be an idea about how to extend or improve some aspects of the presented research, or it may be an argument about or discussion of the implications for such research on society or on other areas of research. That is, the your goal should be to find some way to engage with a topic, give it some thought (and usually further research in the literature - learn how to use Google Scholar if you don't already do that routinely), and write those thoughts down. Research essays should be brief – no more than 750 words. Ideally, your research essays should result in an idea for research, broadly construed. They might also be precursors to your larger research proposal.