How to Write a Review

You may at some point in your life be asked to review a paper for a conference. A good review is one that follows the desired format asked by the Program Committee of the conference, is polite, and is specific in its criticism and suggested improvements.

Different conferences use different review formats. Below is one format which, if adhered to, gives a person who has not read the paper a pretty good idea of both the contents and your opinion of the quality of the paper.

If you have ever submitted a paper to a conference and received reviews for it, you know that more often than not, reviewers do not stick to the requested format, or write very few comments. People are busy, and often do not take the time to carefully read the paper and write a review. A one-sentence summary of a paper usually does not give an outsider any idea of what the paper is about. Saying "this paper sucks" without going into detail justifying why you think the paper is problematic is neither helpful nor fair. Similarly, saying "this paper rocks!" without offering any other suggestions for improving the paper is equally unhelpful. Saying "the ideas in this paper are not novel and can already be found in the literature" without providing specific references to previously published papers that propose the same ideas is a waste of everyone's time, not to mention obnoxious.

1   Rating the Paper

Many conferences ask you to judge the paper (usually on a scale of 1 to 5) in a number of categories. For example:

- Relevance: How relevant is the paper to the conference?

- Presentation: How well-written is the paper? Is it totally incomprehensible or lucid and eloquent?

- Originality: How novel is the paper? Are the technical ideas presented new?

- Correctness: Is the paper technically correct? Are the experiments performed or the analysis presented valid?

- Confidence: How well-versed are you, the reviewer, in this area? Are you an expert in the field and confident your feedback is correct or are you unfamiliar with the field and unsure of your feedback?

- Overall: What is your overall rating for this paper? Do you enthusiastically support acceptance of this paper into the conference, or would you be embarrassed to be on a Program Committee that accepted a paper like this?

2   Review Format for CS 264

In the reviews you write for CS 264, you do NOT need to rate the paper. Instead you should write text answering the following questions:

1. Provide a short summary of the paper (1-2 paragraphs).

2. List the strengths of this paper (in bullet form). Another way this can be phrased: list reasons why this paper should be accepted into the conference. Aim to list at least 2-3 strengths.

3. List the weaknesses of this paper (in bullet form). Why should this paper be rejected? You should have at least 2-3 weaknesses, along with justifications for why you think these are weaknesses and ways you think the paper could be improved to correct these weaknesses.