1 The Assignment

This assignment will give you some experience preparing and presenting a technical talk, as well as critiquing other technical talks, in a friendly setting. In addition, the talk may introduce you to tools that may be helpful for preparing presentations.

The motivation for this assignment is that all professionals need to become comfortable presenting technical material. During the course of your career you will be called upon numerous times to present project overviews, give high-level or detailed design reviews, present status reports, explain how to use new software tools, train customers to use newly developed or installed products, and so on. You may become a subject matter expert, but that won’t be enough to progress in your career. You will also need to be able to logically organize and explain technical material so that others may learn something from your expertise.

1.1 Topics

Your task is to make a presentation about a software product. This is not intended to be a research project, although you may have to do some research if you select a product you are not familiar with, or one you have only passing familiarity with. You do not need to describe an entire software package, but rather choose a useful or advanced feature of an editor, a shell, or some other utility. It is sometimes difficult to judge the knowledge of your audience for a talk such as this. Unless you know for sure that your entire audience knows most of the details of your topic, you’re better off making your talk primarily introductory. If you introduce technical jargon, be sure to define your terms. Note that this presentation will be about a software tool or product, or perhaps a procedure for doing something (such as shell scripting). While your talk can include some opinions, that should not be the focus.

A list of possible topics is given at http://www.cs.rit.edu/~vcss341. The list is by no means exhaustive. You may already be aware of a tool that would interest the class. The product you choose does not have to run on the systems in the CS labs; it simply needs to be a product that would generally be considered useful to software developers.

Make sure you schedule enough time to conduct research, if you need it, and to prepare and practice your presentation. Preparation also includes time needed to prepare handouts and transparencies or slides. We’ll go over in class general guidelines and elements that make presentations effective and you’ll come to realize that there are a number of details that you have to deal with in order to produce an effective presentation.

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1 Adapted from RIT DCS, H. Etlinger
Certainly, using a laptop may be an effective way to present your material or to demonstrate the product. Find out exactly how to set up your equipment in the classroom we are using. Find out whether you can access the campus network properly. Find out whether the response time that you get is adequate for your needs. Find out if the slides are visible from all parts of the room. Most importantly, have a contingency plan in case something does not function properly on the day of your talk.

There is no official peer review for this assignment. It is a good idea, however, to review your plans, your materials, and other aspects of your presentation with the members of your group. You should also consider practicing your presentation in front of your group or others to help you gain confidence and generate ideas for improving your talk.

1.2 Scheduling and Approval

As a general rule, only one person in a section may present on a given topic, although some exceptions may be made. Each day of presentations will have six or seven time slots scheduled. Your request for a topic and a time slot must be sent to your instructor via an email message by the given due date. Topics and time slots will be scheduled on a first-come first-served basis. The email request must be formal, not casual. Include in your subject line your course number and your section number, as well as a clear indication of the nature of your message. In the body of your message, list more than one possible topic, listed in order of your preference. For each proposed topic include two or three sentences describing what you plan to cover. Also list in order of preference several day/time slots (each entry in the list should consist of a specific date and a specific time). As topics and time slots are approved, they will be posted on a web page. You may wish to consult this schedule before making your request.

1.3 Content and Format

Your time is limited to no more than 15 minutes. Your presentation should last ten to twelve minutes, allowing three to five additional minutes for questions from the audience. Be prepared, however, if there are no questions, by having a little extra material that you could elaborate on (think of a question you might want to ask, and then answer it yourself!) You will also have access to the white board in the classroom, if you need it. Plan on distributing handouts to the class. Include in your presentation whatever visual aids you think are desirable (e.g., outlines, diagrams, screen dumps, tables, charts, etc.) to help get the message across that you would like to convey.

It is expected that the bulk of your presentation will consist of material that you produce yourself. In some cases, you may wish to show or distribute material that comes from other sources. That’s fine, but make sure you properly acknowledge all sources. While some examples developed by others will be acceptable, you should strive to develop your own examples as well.
If you would like me to copy handouts for you, you must give them to me at least 48 hours before you’re scheduled to talk. Along with your handouts, include a separate request memo that formalizes your request and includes any specific copying instructions (for example, single-sided, double-sided, stapled, etc.). You may either give this request directly to me, leave it in the mailbox outside of my office, or send to me via email with the material you would like copied attached to the email message. You must follow formal memo format in order for the request to be honored.

When it’s your turn to present, take a moment to organize yourself. Consider whether you need to adjust the lights or arrange anything else in the classroom. Consider how best to distribute handouts (make sure I get a copy). Factor in time to set up and take down equipment.

1.4 Resources

When preparing your presentation, it may help if you are already familiar with the software you plan to talk about. If you’re not, then make an effort to gain some firsthand experience with the material prior to presenting it to the class. Places to look for ideas include: the online UNIX®\(^2\) manual pages (type “man xxx” at the prompt, where xxx is the name of a Unix utility), various tutorial and reference documents in the CSL (ask the lab assistant on duty for access if necessary), books about Windows, Unix, etc. There are some books in the graduate CS lab library that may be useful, and there are numerous books in the Wallace library and the bookstore.

1.5 Attire

The purpose of this assignment is to give you as realistic an experience as possible within a class setting. This includes dressing as you would for a formal business presentation to clients. Men should wear a tie, slacks, reasonable shoes and optionally, a sport coat or suit. Women should wear a dress, a “dressy” blouse and skirt, a blouse and slacks, or a business suit. This will help set a business-like tone for the class. We want you to think of your presentation as a technical talk delivered to colleagues, some of whom may not be familiar with you or with the product you are talking about.

2 Evaluation

Each speaker will be critiqued by the rest of the class. The critique will cover both technical content and style. A significant portion of your in-class participation grade will be based on your critique of everyone else’s presentation, so you need to be there both mentally and physically. Your attendance at all presentations is required! You will not have to evaluate other people on the day that you speak, although you can do so if you wish.

You should pick up three evaluation forms at the start of class – one for each day’s presenters. Fill in your name and the identifying information for each talk (from the class

\(^2\) UNIX is a registered trademark of The Open Group.
schedule) before the talks begin. As each talk proceeds, fill in parts of the evaluation form and then complete each one shortly after each talk is finished. Evaluations must be turned in at the conclusion of class and are not accepted after that.

3 Grading

Each presenter will receive copies of the evaluations from the class and also the instructor’s comments. A student can earn a maximum score of 150 on their presentation. The score is based on the following grading rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visuals and handouts</td>
<td>0 - 25</td>
<td>format, content, accuracy, support for presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentation content</td>
<td>0 - 25</td>
<td>examples, explanations, accuracy, amount of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentation organization</td>
<td>0 - 25</td>
<td>agenda, introduction, body, conclusion, use of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentation style</td>
<td>0 - 25</td>
<td>pace, mannerisms, confidence, appearance, enthusiasm</td>
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<tr>
<td>overall assessment</td>
<td>0 - 50</td>
<td>integrated view of all presentation aspects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In addition, a student may have their earned score reduced by up to 15 for not following the correct procedure for submitting a request for a topic and time slot.

This assignment is worth a maximum of 15 points toward the “Individual Presentation” category. Dividing the earned score by 10 results in the actual number of points awarded for this category.