Digression: How to choose a thesis topic?
A personal view

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Disclaimer: do not follow these guidelines. Invent yours

How to choose a research topic? Ask people!

- Ask you advisor
  Proven 500 years ago to be questionable
- Ask your friends
  Not so bad, but the risk is to loose some friends
- Ask your neighbors
  Unfortunately, they are musicians and you don't want to change field
- Ask the web

  soon: in beta test at Google

Theorem 1: Nobody will help you

How to choose a research topic? It should serve some goal!

- One that will make you rich

  If you want to be rich, go to industry

- One that will make you smart

  If you are not smart yet, leave this room

  Please! I was just kidding… ☺

- One that will make you famous

  Yes, which one is it?

- One that is useful

  Forget it: the goal is not to fix the problems of the world

  Theorem 2: the *unique* goal of a thesis is to get a thesis

How to choose a research topic? Other possible criteria

- The most difficult one

  First get a thesis, and then only you work on P=NP

- The easiest one

  The statement should be simple (positive elevator talk)

  but the technology nontrivial (negative elevator talk)

- The most popular one, e.g., a QL for XML

  Not good – some of the others may be smarter than you

- The most esoteric one, e.g., loopfree ʊ-derivation in λXML

  Not bad – no one will read your thesis, so it is unlikely that they will find bugs in it

Are you getting desperate?

How to choose a research topic? Wake up! Good ones coming

- Some continuation/increment of some work

  A bad idea: if they didn't do it, it is either boring, useless, very difficult, ugly

  or all of the above

- Something very new

  A great criteria for lazy people – if it is new, it is much easier to get new results

- Something very beautiful

  One great criteria (but be realistic, it will not improve your success with boy/girlfriends)

Theorem 3: It should be new, beautiful, have a simple statement and be technologically difficult

Main result

Theorem 5: You must choose a fun topic

Proof: by Theorem 2, you are going to have a hard time. By Theorem 1, Theorem 3 is bogus – do not believe anyone who claims to know the secrets for finding a topic

Thus, at least, you should enjoy doing it. □

My quotes of the day

I have very high philosophical expectations of what a Ph.D. thesis should be, but I wont let that interfere with my main goal: to get one fast **(anonymous Ph.D. student in Marina del Rey)**

I had this idea of a Ph.D. topic.   I got drunk. It still sounded like a PH.D. topic. Then I decided it was one **(PH.D. student in Cargese who asked to be anonymous)**
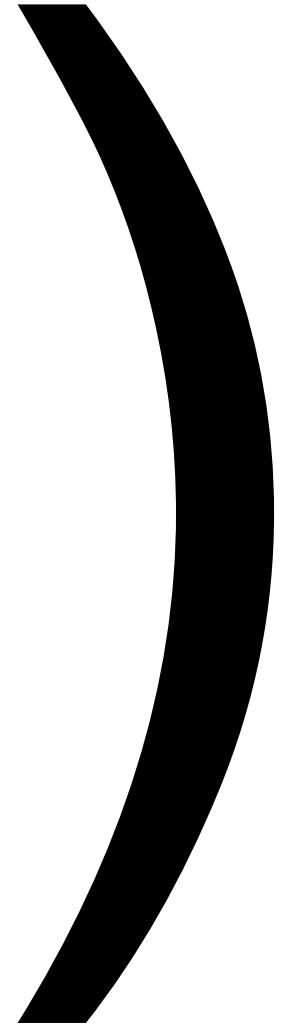
Checklist for a thesis topic on data and web services integration, AXML style

- Is this new? Yes
  - proof by syntax

- Is this beautiful? Yes
  - proof by authority

- Is the model simple? Yes
  - proof by repetition

- Is it technically deep? Yes
  - proof by experience

- If it fun? Omar says yes
  - proof by intimidation

End of digression

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Merci

End of the digression
Back to work