

Final squib and presentation

In linguistics the term “squib,” originally popularized by the journal *Linguistic Inquiry*, refers to a short paper that raises an interesting problem—and may or may not actually solve it.

Overview and deadlines

Think of the squib as a **phonology problem** that **you create and solve yourself**. So the same criteria that have been important in analysis assignments are relevant here too:

- Your presentation of the data, generalizations, phonological analysis, and discussion should demonstrate that you have an **insightful understanding of the course material**. Wherever possible, use the techniques of analysis and argumentation and the theoretical ideas that we have emphasized in the course. Or, if you find that your problem is difficult to solve given the phonological tools that we have, show as explicitly as possible where the problem is or why things don't seem to work out.
- The way you structure your squib will be important too: Is the exposition clear and logically organized? Are your **descriptive generalizations** and **formal analyses** supported by **evidence** (e.g., systematically organized lists of data and valid ranking arguments) and **discussion**?

Your squib must make a **novel contribution**, even if it's a small one: propose a new analysis for known data, apply a known analytical approach to new data, etc.

- In your presentation and write-up, you must make it clear which of the points you discuss come from past work, and which points are your novel contribution.

Deadlines

- Squib proposal is due (in Canvas “Assignments”) by **11:55pm on Tu Apr 9**.
- In-class workshop-style presentation of your data and analysis: one of the last two class days (**Th Apr 25 or Tu Apr 30**). Slides are due (in Canvas “Assignments”) by **2:30pm** on the day of your presentation.
- Final write-up of squib is due (in Canvas “Assignments”) by **Th May 5, 4:00pm**.

Choosing a topic

If you already have a topic in mind, great. If you don't, then some suggestions for **how to find a topic** are given below. I will be happy to give guidance or feedback as you work to choose a topic, but try to have at least a preliminary idea before you email or talk with me about it. Keeping in mind the suggestions in McCarthy (2008: §2.1) will also be useful.

Note: It can be hard to go from *raw linguistic data* to a good paper in a short time. So unless you have a lot of experience, you might want to start with a phenomenon that has already been clearly described (and perhaps even analyzed in a non-OT framework or in a different way).

- (1) *Analyze some aspect of the phonology of a language that you know.* Examples:
- What is the syllable structure of language X, and what constraint ranking would produce this syllable structure? This works especially well if the language shows alternations related to syllable structure (epenthesis, deletion, metathesis...)
 - How would some particular phonological alternation in language X be analyzed? What are the cross-linguistic implications or predictions of your analysis? Can you find another language that represents a different ranking of your key constraints?
 - How are loanwords from language Y adapted in language X, and what does that suggest about the phonology (constraint ranking) of language X?
- (2) *Find an analysis of a phenomenon in some language that was done in a non-OT framework and see how the phenomenon could be analyzed in OT.* Old conference proceedings from before about 1993 are a good place to find interesting data. Note: Many of these may be physical volumes in the library! But here are some conferences with at least some older volumes online:
- BLS proceedings: <https://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/proceedings.html>
 - CLS proceedings: <http://chicagolinguisticsociety.org/list.html> (browse tables of contents on that page, then follow the link for full PDF volumes)
 - NELS proceedings: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/nels/>

References and citation

One of the main purposes of the squib assignment is to encourage you to think creatively about issues in phonology and apply the tools that you know to new situations. So for now, it is not necessary for you to read and respond to *all* previous work on your topic. However, your squib should **respond to at least one published source**. You may want to use a previous analysis of the language that you are interested in as a source of data and/or an approach to compare with your proposal. You may want to refer to specific ideas or proposals in some of the assigned class readings. Also, I may suggest a relevant background reference or two for you to consult.

- Be sure to **cite** every reference that you use, whether it is an assigned class reading or something you have found on your own.
- Avoid using direct quotations from another author except in cases where the author's exact wording is relevant. In nearly all cases, you should **paraphrase** the original author's words. (You still need to give a citation of the original work.)
- Follow the usual **linguistics conventions** for citations: Give the author's name and publication date, plus page number if relevant, in the body of the paper (not in a special footnote), and include a bibliography of sources at the end of the paper.

Examples: This phonological principle was first applied to tone languages (Leben 1973).
 Prince & Smolensky (1993: 35) define the constraint $EDGE_{MOST}$ as follows.

Topic proposal — due **Tu Apr 9** | 5% of final course grade

Your proposal can be short, about 1-2 pages, but it should be as concrete as possible so that I can give useful feedback. If you have trouble finding a topic, please talk to me **before** the deadline.

Be sure that your proposal includes the following:

- Research question/main point—stated concretely
- Representative data to illustrate the phenomenon—systematically organized; relevance to the topic or research question explained
- A statement of how this topic and/or data is relevant to concepts from class
- **At least one** reference you have used or plan to use—briefly explain how it is relevant

Class presentation — **last two class meetings** | 10% of final course grade

The squib presentations will be done in a workshop format. Your presentation will be like a first draft of your paper, presented to your classmates for feedback. ***Your analysis and discussion should be complete at this point, so that you can use feedback to improve your project.***

- **Length:** 15 minutes (± 2) for your presentation, plus 5-10 minutes for discussion.
- **Format:** Present and justify your analysis to the class. Usually, this will mean previewing the main point of your proposal, presenting the relevant data in a systematic way as you state your descriptive generalizations, and proposing a formal phonological analysis of the phenomenon that uses the tools of a model to account for the patterns that you have found. If you are unable to solve every aspect of the problem, talk about why that is. (Your classmates may have some ideas!)
- **Slides:** Your slides should contain not only data, but also your discussion and proposal in outline form. Make sure that your key points and main arguments are clear from the slides only—this is standard practice in linguistics, since conference presentations are often cited as sources.
 - By 2:30pm on the day of your presentation, you must **upload** your slides to Canvas. PDF files are recommended so that IPA characters and formatting are not mangled.
- **Comments for presenters:** For all presentations other than your own, you are required to submit **at least one written comment or question** for each presenter. (Slides will be available; submission link will be provided.) These comments and questions will help the presenter finalize the write-up.

As far as possible, your comment should address something substantial, such as:

- i) (Potential) problems for the analysis — is there another candidate, constraint, generalization, or other factor that should be considered?
- ii) Points that might be misleading or unclear

Squib write-up — due **Th May 9, 4:00pm** | 15% of final course grade

Once you have finished your presentation, much of the work will be done. The last step is to think about the feedback from your classmates and me, and finalize your discussion.

- **Length:** There is no strict requirement; a suggestion is to aim for 7 to 10 pages. Longer is fine if necessary, but don't go out of your way to "pad" the length.
- **Format:** The squib should be structured like a phonology write-up, not like a "book report" or a literature review. This means we should see the following general structure to the squib. Break your paper into numbered sections and subsections that reflect this structure. (See the links on the squib information web page for additional suggestions.)

(i) Introduction. Think of this not as "all the background on the topic," but instead as "the contribution this squib is making"—it should tell the reader what the squib's main proposal (novel contribution!) is, and the goal of each section of the squib that follows. Basically, you're *answering* your research question here (without actually stating it in the form of a question).

- Your thoughts on what your novel contribution is may change as you work on your project; that's normal. By the time you are writing your project up, try to find the aspect of your topic that is **most interesting or surprising**, and highlight that.

(ii) Descriptive generalizations. Use the skills developed in your analysis assignments!

- State the important **generalizations** about the data.
- Present a **sufficient** amount of **well-organized data** to support your claims.
- Organize the data so that the generalizations you want to support are **easy to see**. Never give the reader a giant pile of data and expect them to figure it out for themselves—always tell them what to look at and why it's important. Likewise, don't put lots of data first and lots of generalizations second; keep each generalization close to the data that supports it. Make it easy for your reader to evaluate your claims.

(iii) Formal analysis. Use the **tools of our phonological model**, including representational elements such as features and syllable structure, along with an OT (or HG, HS) analysis, to show the reader how your idea works. Again, use the skills you have been developing all semester: Use features and/or syllable structure insightfully, if relevant for your project. You will probably be proposing and defending an OT grammar, so use what you know about defining constraints, choosing useful losers for your tableaux, making valid ranking arguments, etc., as you develop your analysis.

- Note that if you have more than one somewhat separate set of data+generalizations, you might wish to do multiple rounds of (ii) and (iii) for each subpart of your squib.

(iv) Conclusion. End with a concluding discussion that briefly recaps your analysis, highlighting your novel contribution. You might also wish to identify questions for future research.

squib (noun), from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2ed.) <www.oed.com> — excerpts

1. a. A common species of firework, in which the burning of the composition is usually terminated by a slight explosion.
d. fig. or in fig. contexts. damp squib, something that fails ignominiously to satisfy the expectations aroused by it; an anti-climax, a disappointment.
2. a. An explosive device used as a missile or means of attack. Obs.
3. A smart gird or hit; a sharp scoff or sarcasm; a short composition of a satirical and witty character; a lampoon.
4. Applied to persons:
 - a. A mean, insignificant, or paltry fellow; also, a short or thin person.
 - b. A subordinate decoy in a gambling-house.
 - e. A horse lacking courage or endurance; hence, a coward. Austral. slang.
5. A squirt or syringe. Now dial.
7. a. A small measure or quantity (of strong drink). Now dial.
 - b. slang. A head of asparagus.
 - c. colloq. A kind of sweet made up in a form resembling a squib.