EMNLP 2019 MRQA Workshop

Proceedings of the 2nd Workshop on Machine Reading for Question Answering

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# Introduction

Our workshop focuses on machine reading for question answering (MRQA), which has become an important testbed for evaluating how computer systems understand natural language, as well as a crucial technology for applications such as search engines and dialog systems. In recent years, research community has showed rapid progress on both datasets and models. Many large-scale datasets are proposed and the development of more accurate and more efficient question answering systems followed. Despite recent progress, yet there is much to be desired about these datasets and systems, such as model interpretability, ability to abstain from answering when there is no adequate answer, and adequate modeling of inference (e.g., entailment and multi-sentence reasoning).

This year, we focus on generalization of QA systems and present a new shared task on the topic. Our shared task addresses the following research question: how can one build a robust question answering system that can perform well questions from unseen domains? Train and test datasets may differ in passage distribution (from different sources (e.g., science, news, novels, medical abstracts, etc) with pronounced syntactic and lexical differences), question distribution (different styles (e.g., entity-centric, relational, other tasks reformulated as QA, etc) from different sources (e.g., crowdworkers, domain experts, exam writers, etc.)), as well as joint question-answering distribution (e.g., question collected independent vs. dependent of evidence).

For this task, we adapted and unified 18 distinct question answering datasets into the same format. We focus on extractive question answering. That is, given a question and context passage, systems must find a segment of text, or span in the document that best answers the question. While this format is somewhat restrictive, it allows us to leverage many existing datasets, and its simplicity helps us focus on out-of-domain generalization, instead of other important but orthogonal challenges. We released six larger datasets as training, and another six datasets for development. The rest six datasets were hidden from shared task participants until the final evaluation. Nine teams submitted to our shared task and the winning system achieved an average F1 score of 72.5 on the held-out datasets, 10.7 absolute points higher than our initial baseline based on BERT large.

This proceeding includes our report on the findings from this shared task as well as six system description papers from the shared task participants.

Similar to last year, we also sought research track submissions. We have received 39 paper submissions to the research track after the withdrawls, almost double the submission from last year. Out of this, twenty two papers are accepted and presented in this proceedings, and two papers are selected for the best paper award.

In the workshop program, we also include four cross submissions of work presented in other venues already.

The program features 22 new research track papers, six shared track papers and four cross-submissions from related areas, to be presented as either posters and talks. We are also excited to host remarkable invited speakers, including Mohit Bansal, Antoine Bordes, Jordan Boyd-Graber and Matt Gardner.

We thank the program committee, the EMNLP workshop chairs, the invited speakers, our sponsors Baidu, Facebook and NAVER and our steering committee: Jonathan Berant, Percy Liang, Luke Zettlemoyer.

Adam Fisch, Alon Talmor, Robin Jia, Minjoon Seo, Eunsol Choi, Danqi Chen

### **Steering Committee:**

Jonathan Berant, Tel Aviv University Percy Liang, Stanford University Luke Zettlemoyer, University of Washington

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Peng Qi, Stanford University Pradeep Dasigi, Allen Institute for AI Quan Wang, Baidu Rajarshi Das, UMass Saizheng Zhang, University of Montreal Sameer Singh, UC Irvine Scott Wen-tau Yih, Facebook Sebastian Riedel, University College London/Facebook Semih Yagcioglu, Hacettepe University Sewon Min, University of Washington Siva Reddy, Stanford University Todor Mihaylov, Heidelberg University Tom Kwiatkowski, Google Tushar Khot, Allen Institute for AI Adams Wei Yu, Carnegie Mellon University Wenhan Xiong, UC Santa Barbara Xiaodong Liu, Microsoft Yichen Jiang, UNC Chapel Hill Zhilin Yang, Carnegie Mellon University

### **Invited Speaker:**

Mohit Bansal, UNC Chapel Hill Antoine Bordes, Facebook AI Research Jordan Boyd-Graber, University of Maryland Matt Gardner, Allen Institute for AI

# **Table of Contents**

<i>MRQA 2019 Shared Task: Evaluating Generalization in Reading Comprehension</i> Adam Fisch, Alon Talmor, Robin Jia, Minjoon Seo, Eunsol Choi and Danqi Chen
Inspecting Unification of Encoding and Matching with Transformer: A Case Study of Machine Reading Comprehension Hangbo Bao, Li Dong, Furu Wei, Wenhui Wang, Nan Yang, Lei Cui, Songhao Piao and Ming Zhou
14
CALOR-QUEST : generating a training corpus for Machine Reading Comprehension models from shal- low semantic annotations
FREDERIC BECHET, Cindy Aloui, Delphine Charlet, Geraldine Damnati, Johannes Heinecke,         Alexis Nasr and Frederic Herledan         19
<i>Improving Subject-Area Question Answering with External Knowledge</i> Xiaoman Pan, Kai Sun, Dian Yu, Jianshu Chen, Heng Ji, Claire Cardie and Dong Yu
Answer-Supervised Question Reformulation for Enhancing Conversational Machine Comprehension Qian Li, Hui Su, CHENG NIU, Daling Wang, Zekang Li, Shi Feng and yifei zhang
<ul> <li>Simple yet Effective Bridge Reasoning for Open-Domain Multi-Hop Question Answering Wenhan Xiong, Mo Yu, Xiaoxiao Guo, Hong Wang, Shiyu Chang, Murray Campbell and William Yang Wang</li></ul>
<i>Improving the Robustness of Deep Reading Comprehension Models by Leveraging Syntax Prior</i> Bowen Wu, Haoyang Huang, Zongsheng Wang, Qihang Feng, Jingsong Yu and Baoxun Wang . 53
Reasoning Over Paragraph Effects in Situations           Kevin Lin, Oyvind Tafjord, Peter Clark and Matt Gardner
<i>Towards Answer-unaware Conversational Question Generation</i> Mao Nakanishi, Tetsunori Kobayashi and Yoshihiko Hayashi
Cross-Task Knowledge Transfer for Query-Based Text Summarization Elozino Egonmwan, Vittorio Castelli and Md Arafat Sultan
Book QA: Stories of Challenges and Opportunities Stefanos Angelidis, Lea Frermann, Diego Marcheggiani, Roi Blanco and Lluís Màrquez78
FlowDelta: Modeling Flow Information Gain in Reasoning for Conversational Machine Comprehension         Yi-Ting Yeh and Yun-Nung Chen
<i>Do Multi-hop Readers Dream of Reasoning Chains?</i> Haoyu Wang, Mo Yu, Xiaoxiao Guo, Rajarshi Das, Wenhan Xiong and Tian Gao
<i>Machine Comprehension Improves Domain-Specific Japanese Predicate-Argument Structure Analysis</i> Norio Takahashi, Tomohide Shibata, Daisuke Kawahara and Sadao Kurohashi
<i>On Making Reading Comprehension More Comprehensive</i> Matt Gardner, Jonathan Berant, Hannaneh Hajishirzi, Alon Talmor and Sewon Min 105

<ul> <li>Multi-step Entity-centric Information Retrieval for Multi-Hop Question Answering</li> <li>Rajarshi Das, Ameya Godbole, Dilip Kavarthapu, Zhiyu Gong, Abhishek Singhal, Mo Yu, Xiaoxiao</li> <li>Guo, Tian Gao, Hamed Zamani, Manzil Zaheer and Andrew McCallum</li></ul>
<i>Evaluating Question Answering Evaluation</i> Anthony Chen, Gabriel Stanovsky, Sameer Singh and Matt Gardner
<i>Bend but Don't Break? Multi-Challenge Stress Test for QA Models</i> Hemant Pugaliya, James Route, Kaixin Ma, Yixuan Geng and Eric Nyberg
ReQA: An Evaluation for End-to-End Answer Retrieval ModelsAmin Ahmad, Noah Constant, Yinfei Yang and Daniel Cer137
Comprehensive Multi-Dataset Evaluation of Reading Comprehension Dheeru Dua, Ananth Gottumukkala, Alon Talmor, Matt Gardner and Sameer Singh 147
A Recurrent BERT-based Model for Question Generation Ying-Hong Chan and Yao-Chung Fan154
Let Me Know What to Ask: Interrogative-Word-Aware Question Generation Junmo Kang, Haritz Puerto San Roman and sung-hyon myaeng
Extractive NarrativeQA with Heuristic Pre-Training         Lea Frermann       172
CLER: Cross-task Learning with Expert Representation to Generalize Reading and Understanding Takumi Takahashi, Motoki Taniguchi, Tomoki Taniguchi and Tomoko Ohkuma
<i>Question Answering Using Hierarchical Attention on Top of BERT Features</i> Reham Osama, Nagwa El-Makky and Marwan Torki
<i>Domain-agnostic Question-Answering with Adversarial Training</i> Seanie Lee, Donggyu Kim and Jangwon Park
<i>Generalizing Question Answering System with Pre-trained Language Model Fine-tuning</i> Dan Su, Yan Xu, Genta Indra Winata, Peng Xu, Hyeondey Kim, Zihan Liu and Pascale Fung . 203
D-NET: A Pre-Training and Fine-Tuning Framework for Improving the Generalization of Machine Read- ing Comprehension
Hongyu Li, Xiyuan Zhang, Yibing Liu, Yiming Zhang, Quan Wang, Xiangyang Zhou, Jing Liu, Hua Wu and Haifeng Wang
An Exploration of Data Augmentation and Sampling Techniques for Domain-Agnostic Question Answering

# **Conference Program**

Monday, November 4, 2019

- 9:00–9:35 Invited talk I: Antoine Bordes
- 9:35–10:10 Invited talk II: Matt Gardner
- 10:10–10:30 Best paper session I: Multi-step Entity-centric Information Retrieval for Multi-Hop Question Answering
- 10:30–11:00 Coffee break
- 11:00–11:35 Invited talk III: Jordan Boyd-Graber

### Shared task

- 11:35–12:10 *MRQA 2019 Shared Task: Evaluating Generalization in Reading Comprehension* Adam Fisch, Alon Talmor, Robin Jia, Minjoon Seo, Eunsol Choi and Danqi Chen
- 12:10–12:30 Shared task best system session: D-NET: A Pre-Training and Fine-Tuning Framework for Improving the Generalization of Machine Reading Comprehension
- 12:30–14:00 Lunch break
- 14:00-14:20 Best paper session II: Evaluating Question Answering Evaluation
- 14:20–14:55 Invited talk IV: Mohit Bansal

#### Monday, November 4, 2019 (continued)

#### **Poster session**

- 14:55–16:30 Inspecting Unification of Encoding and Matching with Transformer: A Case Study of Machine Reading Comprehension
   Hangbo Bao, Li Dong, Furu Wei, Wenhui Wang, Nan Yang, Lei Cui, Songhao Piao and Ming Zhou
- 14:55–16:30 CALOR-QUEST : generating a training corpus for Machine Reading Comprehension models from shallow semantic annotations
   FREDERIC BECHET, Cindy Aloui, Delphine Charlet, Geraldine Damnati, Johannes Heinecke, Alexis Nasr and Frederic Herledan
- 14:55–16:30 Improving Subject-Area Question Answering with External Knowledge Xiaoman Pan, Kai Sun, Dian Yu, Jianshu Chen, Heng Ji, Claire Cardie and Dong Yu
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   Qian Li, Hui Su, CHENG NIU, Daling Wang, Zekang Li, Shi Feng and yifei zhang
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   Wenhan Xiong, Mo Yu, Xiaoxiao Guo, Hong Wang, Shiyu Chang, Murray Campbell and William Yang Wang
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   Bowen Wu, Haoyang Huang, Zongsheng Wang, Qihang Feng, Jingsong Yu and Baoxun Wang
- 14:55–16:30 *Reasoning Over Paragraph Effects in Situations* Kevin Lin, Oyvind Tafjord, Peter Clark and Matt Gardner
- 14:55–16:30 *Towards Answer-unaware Conversational Question Generation* Mao Nakanishi, Tetsunori Kobayashi and Yoshihiko Hayashi
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   Yi-Ting Yeh and Yun-Nung Chen

# Monday, November 4, 2019 (continued)

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14:55-16:30	Machine Comprehension Improves Domain-Specific Japanese Predicate-Argument Structure Analysis Norio Takahashi, Tomohide Shibata, Daisuke Kawahara and Sadao Kurohashi
14:55–16:30	<i>On Making Reading Comprehension More Comprehensive</i> Matt Gardner, Jonathan Berant, Hannaneh Hajishirzi, Alon Talmor and Sewon Min
14:55–16:30	<i>Multi-step Entity-centric Information Retrieval for Multi-Hop Question Answering</i> Rajarshi Das, Ameya Godbole, Dilip Kavarthapu, Zhiyu Gong, Abhishek Singhal, Mo Yu, Xiaoxiao Guo, Tian Gao, Hamed Zamani, Manzil Zaheer and Andrew Mc- Callum
14:55–16:30	<i>Evaluating Question Answering Evaluation</i> Anthony Chen, Gabriel Stanovsky, Sameer Singh and Matt Gardner
14:55–16:30	Bend but Don't Break? Multi-Challenge Stress Test for QA Models Hemant Pugaliya, James Route, Kaixin Ma, Yixuan Geng and Eric Nyberg
14:55–16:30	<i>ReQA: An Evaluation for End-to-End Answer Retrieval Models</i> Amin Ahmad, Noah Constant, Yinfei Yang and Daniel Cer
14:55–16:30	<i>Comprehensive Multi-Dataset Evaluation of Reading Comprehension</i> Dheeru Dua, Ananth Gottumukkala, Alon Talmor, Matt Gardner and Sameer Singh
14:55–16:30	A Recurrent BERT-based Model for Question Generation Ying-Hong Chan and Yao-Chung Fan
14:55–16:30	Let Me Know What to Ask: Interrogative-Word-Aware Question Generation Junmo Kang, Haritz Puerto San Roman and sung-hyon myaeng
14:55–16:30	Extractive NarrativeQA with Heuristic Pre-Training Lea Frermann
14:55–16:30	CLER: Cross-task Learning with Expert Representation to Generalize Reading and Understanding Takumi Takahashi, Motoki Taniguchi, Tomoki Taniguchi and Tomoko Ohkuma

### Monday, November 4, 2019 (continued)

- 14:55–16:30 *Question Answering Using Hierarchical Attention on Top of BERT Features* Reham Osama, Nagwa El-Makky and Marwan Torki
- 14:55–16:30 *Domain-agnostic Question-Answering with Adversarial Training* Seanie Lee, Donggyu Kim and Jangwon Park
- 14:55–16:30 Generalizing Question Answering System with Pre-trained Language Model Finetuning
   Dan Su, Yan Xu, Genta Indra Winata, Peng Xu, Hyeondey Kim, Zihan Liu and Pascale Fung
- 14:55–16:30 D-NET: A Pre-Training and Fine-Tuning Framework for Improving the Generalization of Machine Reading Comprehension Hongyu Li, Xiyuan Zhang, Yibing Liu, Yiming Zhang, Quan Wang, Xiangyang Zhou, Jing Liu, Hua Wu and Haifeng Wang
- 14:55–16:30 An Exploration of Data Augmentation and Sampling Techniques for Domain-Agnostic Question Answering Shayne Longpre, Yi Lu, Zhucheng Tu and Chris DuBois
- 16:30–17:30 Panel discussion