• Location: Room 2205 Computer Science, 2nd floor, Multimedia Lab
• Time: Tue/Thur 5:30-6:50PM
• Required Book: The Elements of Style, 4th edition (Sep 1999), by Strunk & White, 978-0205313426, Hardback ($12 new, Amazon.com) or ISBN 978-0205309023, Paperback ($10 new, $5 rental, SBU Bookstore)
• Free Online Webbook: Technical Writing, by David McMurrey http://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/
• Recommended Text: Pocket Guide to Technical Communication, 5th ed. (2010/2011), by Pfeiffer, 978-0135063965 ($50 new, $23 rental, SBU) or ($43 new, Amazon)
• Instructor: Professor Larry Wittie
• Office/Lab: Room 1308 Computer Science, 1st floor, Network Lab
• Office Hours: 4:10-5:25+7-7:15pm Tu/Th, if door is ajar, or by appointment
• Phone: 632-8750 (not 2-8456)
• Email: larry.wittie@stonybrooke.edu
• Course Homepage: http://www.cs.sunysb.edu/~lw/teaching/cse300
CSE/ISE 300
First Paper – My Snowy Winter

Your printed completed paper is due at start of class today, Thursday 2/20/14. Center the title at top of page 1 with your name beside the printing date on the second line. Paper 1 must be 1.0 page (at least 30 lines and at least 400 words) to 1.4 pages (~40 lines, 560 words) of text, with lines spaced 1.5 (between single- and double-spaced), text lines 6 inches wide, and 13 to 15 words per line. Use font 12. The title, your name, the date, blank lines, and list entries do not count in the required 30+ lines of prose text. Write 36 text lines (500 words) to be safe. Number all pages of all three papers in ‘300.

By Thursday 2/20, email a *doc copy of your paper to larry.wittie@stonybrook.edu with Subject: 300 paper 1 - My Snowy Winter. Bring a printed paper 1 to class.
Offputting/Ongoing

Avoid the newfound adjectives *ongoing* and *offputting* because they are clumsy and inexact. As a simple test, transform the participles to verbs. Can one *offput* or *ongo*?

One/One’s

*One* in the sense of “a person” must not be followed by *his* or *her*. *One’s* is the correct possessive form.

One must watch his step. One must watch one’s step.

One of the most

Avoid this feeble formula in your writing.

-orienteled

Avoid this clumsy, pretentious device.

It is a manufacturing-oriented company. It is chiefly a manufacturing company.
Partially/Partly  

*Partially* is not always interchangeable with *partly*. *Partially* is best used in the sense of “to a certain degree” when speaking of a condition. *Partly* carries the idea of a part of a physical object as distinct from the whole object.

The log was partially submerged. **The log was partly submerged.**  
I am partially resigned to it.

People/Public/Person  

*The people* is not the same as *the public*. *The people* give political support or opposition; *the public* give artistic recognition or commercial success. *People* should not be used with numbers, as a substitute for *persons*. One can say “five persons” or “one person,” but “one people” is not “one person.”

Personalize  

Avoid this pretentious *-ize* word in your writing.

a highly personalized affair  
personalize your stationery  

*a highly personal affair*  
*design a letterhead*
CSE/ISE 300
Strunk and White: Commonly Misused Words

Personally  Personally is often unnecessary.
Personally, I thought it was a good book.  I thought it was a good book.

Possess  Avoid using possess simply because it sounds more impressive than have or own.
She possessed great courage.  She had great courage.
He was the fortunate possessor of

Presently  Presently has two meanings: “soon” and “currently.” To avoid ambiguity, use it only when it means “soon.”
She will be here presently.
We are presently reviewing your resume.  We are reviewing your resume now.
Prestigious  "Prestigious" is another vague adjective to avoid.

Regretful  "Regretful" means "full of regret", but is carelessly used as a substitute for "regrettable", meaning "must be regretted."

The mixup was due to a regretful failure in planning.  

Relate  "Relate" should not be used intransitively to suggest rapport.

I relate well to Janet.  

Janet and I agree a lot.

Respective/Respectively  These words usually should be omitted.

Works of fiction are listed under the names of their respective authors.

The mile run and the two-mile run were won by Jones and Cummings respectively.

Works of fiction are listed under the names of their authors.

The mile run was won by Jones, the two-mile run by Cummings.
CSE/ISE 300

Strunk and White: Commonly Misused Words

Secondly/Thirdly … Do not prettify numbers with -ly. Use first, second, third, and so on.

Shall/Will The future tense normally is expressed by I shall, you will, she will. To express determination or emphatic consent, the uses of shall and will are reversed - I will, you shall, he shall.

So Avoid the use of so as an intensifier: “so good”; “so warm.”

Split infinitive Avoid placing an adverb between a to and its verb infinitive, unless you want to place unusual stress on the adverb.

to diligently inquire to inquire diligently

We hope to soundly defeat our opponents in tonight’s game.

State State should not be used as a mere substitute for say or remark. Restrict state to mean “express fully and completely.”

What did he state at the party? What did he say at the party?

She refused to state her objections.
Stationary/Stationery  
*Stationary* means “motionless”; *stationery* means “paper and envelopes to write letters.” Think *e* for *envelope*.

Student body  
Almost always replace *student body* by *students*.

- a member of the student body: **a student**
- popular with the student body: **liked by students**

Than  
To avoid ambiguity, examine any sentence using *than* (to express comparison) to see if any essential words are missing.

- I am probably closer to my mother than my father.  
- I am probably closer to my mother than to my father.
- I am probably closer to my mother than my father is.

Thanking you in advance  
Avoid this phrase. It just says that you will not bother to write again, even if common courtesy suggests that you send an acknowledgement.
That/Which  

That is the defining, or restrictive pronoun; which is the non-defining pronoun. Avoid reversing the two words.

*The lawn mower that is broken is in the garage.*  (which one)

*The lawn mower, which is broken, is in the garage.*  (extra fact)

The foreseeable future  
Avoid this fuzzy cliché.

The truth is …/The fact is …  
Avoid these bad starts to a sentence. If you have the truth, just state it without advance billing.

They/He or she  
Do not use the plural pronoun they when the antecedent is a singular noun, anybody, somebody, someone, or a distributive expression such as each, each one, everybody, every one, or many a man. Use the singular pronoun he, she, or he or she.

Every one of us knows they are fallible.  

Every one of us knows he is fallible.
They/He or she (continued) Consider these strategies to avoid awkward overuse of *he or she* or unintentional emphasis on the masculine.

Use the plural rather than the singular forms of words throughout.

The writer must address his readers’ concerns.  
Writers must address their readers’ concerns.

Eliminate the singular pronoun altogether.

The writer must address his readers’ concerns.  
The writer must address readers’ concerns.

Substitute the second person for the third person.

The writer must address his readers’ concerns.  
As a writer, you must address your readers’ concerns.
The pronoun *this*, when used to refer to the sense of the complete preceding sentence or clause, may seem to refer to just the last part, making the meaning ambiguous. Reword to correct.

Visiting dignitaries watched yesterday as ground was broken for the new high-energy physics laboratory with a blowout safety wall. This is the first visible evidence of the university’s plans for modernization and expansion.

Visiting dignitaries watched yesterday as ground was broken for the new high-energy physics laboratory with a blowout safety wall. The ceremony afforded the first visible evidence of the university’s plans for modernization and expansion.
Thrust  This showy noun, with its suggestion of power and hint of sex, is much abused by executives and politicians. Use it sparingly and in its specific technical meanings.

The thrust of his letter was that he was working more hours than he had bargained for.

The point he made in his letter was that he was working for more hours than he had bargained.

The piston has a five-inch thrust.

Tortuous/Torturous  A winding road is tortuous; a painful ordeal is torturous. Both words derive from Latin for “twist.”

With its many turns, the mountain road was torturous.

With its many turns, the mountain road was tortuous.

Transpire  Use transpire only to mean “become known” or “leak out.” Do not use it to mean simply “happen” or “come to pass.”

What transpired yesterday?

Eventually, the account of his villainy transpired.
Try and/Try to

*Try* takes *to*, the infinitive form of a verb, not *and*.

Try and mend it, please.

Try to mend it, please.

Type

*Type* is not a synonym for *kind of*.

that type employee
I dislike that type publicity.
small, home-type hotels
a new type plane

that kind of employee
I dislike that kind of publicity.
small, homelike hotels
a plane of a new design

Unique

*Unique* means “without like or equal.” There are no degrees of uniqueness.

It is the most unique coffee maker on the market.
The balancing act was very unique.
The most unique spider lives under water in a bubble.

It is a unique coffee maker.
The balancing act was unique.
A unique spider lives under water in a bubble.
Utilize/Use
Prefer simple *use* to the -ize word *utilize*.
I utilized the facilities. I used the toilet.
He utilized the dishwasher. He used the dishwasher.

Verbal/Oral
*Verbal* means “of words” and may refer to expressions in writing or in speech. *Oral* means “of mouth” and limits words to those that are spoken. *Oral agreement* and *written agreement* are very precise phrases; *verbal agreement* is less clear.
We reached verbal agreement. We reached oral agreement.
We reached written agreement.

Very
Use the word *very* only sparingly. Where emphasis is needed, use words strong in themselves.
While Avoid using *while* as a substitute for *although, and,* or *but.* Prefer *while* in its literal sense: “during the time that.” Where *while* is used for *and* or *but,* it often can be replaced by a semicolon. The offices and salesrooms are on the ground floor, while the rest of the building is used for manufacturing. While temperatures reach 90 or 95 degrees in the daytime, nights in the high desert are often cold.

- *wise* The pseudosuffix *-wise* can wrongly be added to any noun, usually with distasteful results: *taxwise, pricewise, poemwise, taffywise.* It is chiefly useful to mean: “in the manner of”: *clockwise.* Avoid the temptation to coin new words by adding *-wise.*
Worth while/Worthwhile

*Not worth while* is overworked as a phrase for vague disapproval. Avoid using it. *Worth while* is correctly applied only to actions. The one-word adjective *worthwhile* is weak and should be avoided. (oe: *while* = the while that)

His books are not worth while. His books are not worth reading. His books are not worth one’s while to read.

A worthwhile project

A promising project

An exciting project

Would

*Would* is commonly used to express habitual or repeated action. When repetition is indicated by such phrases as *once a year*, *every day*, *each Sunday*, the past tense without *would* is better.

He would get up early and prepare his own breakfast before he went to work.

Once a year he would visit the old mansion.

Once a year he visited the old mansion.
Technical writing has a purpose: to get something done

The writer must convey knowledge to the reader(s)
“there’s a tendency to assume readers know more about the subject than they actually do.”, p. 2
Solution: technical writing must be well-organized

Readers: usually multiple readers with diverse needs

Nine steps to better technical writing follow.
Nine steps to better writing

1. Write a brief purpose statement
2. Consider readers’ obstacles
3. Determine technical level of readers
4. Determine decision-making levels of readers
5. Find out what decision makers want
6. Collect and document information carefully
7. Write an outline
8. Write first draft quickly
9. Revise draft in stages