CSE/ISE 300 Writing  F08

- Time: Tue 12:50-1:45PM
- Location: Room 154  Light Engineering
- Required Books: The Elements of Style, 4th edition (2000), Authors: Strunk and White $10 (or $4 2007 reprint by Coyote)
- Online Technical Writing, Author: David A. McMurrey http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/
- Instructor: Professor Larry Wittie
- Office: CS Building, Room 1308
- Phone: 631-632-8750 (not 2-8456)
- Email: lw@ic.sunysb.edu
- Office Hours: 2:00-3:30PM Tue & Thu or by appointment
- Course Homepage: http://www.cs.sunysb.edu/~cse300

- Today, draft 2nd overview to 5+ page paper 3 paper on My Code in class.
- Today, hand back graded draft 1st overview to 5+ page paper 3.
- One third of memo2 papers were too short. Resubmit.
- Graded memo2 back Tuesday, 25 November, New Computer.
Rules (for all English writing, not just technical writing):

1. **Place yourself in the background.** Do not let your mood dominate your writing. Let your words speak to the reader.

2. **Write in a way that comes naturally.** Use words and phrases that come easily. The easily understood “idiomatic” phrases are the ones native speakers use frequently in their speech and writing.

   If English is not your first language, try hard to speak and to write in English in your daily life. If you live in a non-English-speaking community, start to read cheap paperbacks in English on whatever subject interests you. Do not look for high ideals in popular novels, just the words of the language. If you have a private place to read, try reading out loud so your ears and tongue get trained as well as your eyes and brain.

3. **Work from a suitable design.** Make an outline first. Know what you want to say before you start putting words on a page.
Rules (for all English writing, not just technical writing):  
4. Write with nouns and verbs. Do not depend on adjectives and adverbs.
7. Do not overstate. If you say something that is not always true, your readers will not believe you when you are correct.
8. Avoid the use of qualifiers. Omit rather, little, pretty, and very. They suck the life juices out of what you write.
9. Do not affect a breezy manner. Avoid spontaneous, stream-of-consciousness writing. Only a few very talented writers of each generation can write well this way. People have learned that most such emotional noises are junk writing to be avoided.
Rules (for all English writing, not just technical writing):

10. **Use orthodox spelling.** Write *through*, not *thru*; *night*, not *nite*.

11. **Do not explain too much.** At least in prose, the best writers let readers fill in details from their own minds for more vivid images.

12. **Do not construct awkward adverbs.** It is too easy to add -ly to an existing word to make a new adverb. The word *tangledly* is itself a tangle. No one says it. Few people say *tiredly* correctly.

13. **Make sure the reader knows who is speaking in a dialogue.**

14. **Avoid fancy words.** Avoid the elaborate, coy, cute or pretentious.

15. **Do not use dialect unless your ear is good.** Readers may not pronounce misspelled words (representing dialectual variations) as you do. If not, they may not understand what you have written.

16. **Be clear.** Clarity is a virtue. Abandon it only for a good reason.
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Paper 3 Code Documentation

The final and major paper for this course will be due 25 Nov. It counts for 55% of the cumulative grade, which will determine the final course grade of A, B, C, or F. A passing grade is mandatory for graduation. (Talk to me about alternatives to a code paper.)

Your paper 3 must be five to six prose text pages of effective final documentation for a significantly large program that you have written. The code should be 100 to 600 lines that you personally have written and must be included as an appendix to your paper. All the rules for what counts as text in the first two papers apply for paper 3. The code in the appendix and any code quoted in the body of your paper do not count in the minimum of five pages.

Your prose must be interesting to read but must explain your code carefully enough that another professional can take responsibility for it and easily make changes to maintain and improve it.
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Suggestions for Paper 3 Contents

In grading paper3, I expect to see a number of factual details that will help whatever programmer has to modify your code:

What are the code’s major function, its inputs, and its results?

Who wrote the code, for what initial purpose, and when?

How thoroughly was the code tested and with what input data (an appendix should list one or more complete test sets)?

Tersely, what are the major algorithms and data structures? (Do not enumerate every module, like every tree in a forest.)

What are the major limitations of the code, its internal data structures, and any data structures assumed for its inputs?

What code parts do not yet work? What is needed to fix them?

What portions of the code are particularly tricky and may cause undesired side effects if changed hastily?

What changes would you have made to the code if you had had more time to work on it? Why would they have improved it?

What special advice do you give anyone changing the code?