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
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- Office Hours: 2:00-3:30PM Tue & Thu or by appointment
- Course Homepage: http://www.cs.sunysb.edu/~cse300

- Today, printouts for paper 3 Code Update Documentation due.
- Graded memo2 back next Tuesday, New Computer.
- In-class open-book quiz on Strunk & White (+ lectures) next Tues 9 Dec.
- (Bring a pen, your notes, your texts; no computers, no PDAs, no wireless.)
Nauseous/Nauseated  

*Nauseous* means “sickening to contemplate”; *nauseated* means “sick at the stomach”.

I feel nauseous.  

I feel nauseated.

Nice  

*Nice* is an all-purpose word, normally of indistinct meaning. Avoid it in writing, except to mean “precise” or “fine.”

I had a nice time in the nice weather.  

Hers was a nice distinction.

Nor  

*Nor* is often used incorrectly for *or* after negatives.

He cannot eat nor sleep.  

He cannot eat or sleep.

He can neither eat nor sleep.

He cannot eat nor can he sleep.

Nouns used as verbs  

All nouns used as verbs are suspect.

She headquarters in Dallas.  

She has headquarters in Dallas.

He chaired the meeting.  

He was chair of the meeting.
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.

-oriented  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

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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.
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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 use 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.
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.**
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 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.

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 and mend it, please.  
Try to mend it, please.

Type  
Type is not a synonym for kind of.
that type employee  
that kind of employee  
I dislike that type publicity.  
I dislike that kind of publicity.  
small, home-type hotels  
small, homelike hotels  
a new type plane  
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.  
It is a unique coffee maker.  
The balancing act was very unique.  
The balancing act was unique.  
The most unique spider lives under water in a bubble.  
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.
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**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*. 
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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.

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.
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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?