ENTERPRISE CAREERS

Strong writing skills essential for success, even in IT

By Paula Jacobs

No matter how good your technical skills, you probably won't move up the IT career ladder unless your writing measures up.

"One of the most surprising features of the information revolution is that the momentum has turned back to the written word," says Hoyt Hudson, vice president of IS at InterAccess, an Internet service provider in Chicago. "Someone who can come up with precise communication has a real advantage in today's environment."

Whether you are pitching a business case or justifying a budget, the quality of your writing can determine success or failure.

Writing ability is especially important in customer communication. Business proposals, status reports, customer documentation, technical support, or even e-mail replies all depend on clear, written communication.

Alan Cunningham, a manager at Computer Sciences Corp. who is working on a project at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, in Huntsville, Ala., says many failed partnerships between business personnel and their IT counterparts can be directly attributed to lack of communication between the parties.

"Without good communication skills, IT professionals are little good to business people because there is no common platform," Cunningham says. "Just like all IT professionals should have to take some elementary finance and accounting courses to better understand business processes and methods, every IT professional should be able to write cogently and explain technical elements in readable English."

"Knowledge may be power, but communications skills are the primary raw materials of good client relationships," Cunningham adds. Every job description for a new position on his staff includes the following line (which would include other languages if the business were international): "Required: effective organization and mastery of the English language in written and oral forms."

Clear communication can enhance your reputation as an IT professional, says Kevin Jetton, executive vice president of the Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP) and president of GeniSys Consulting Services, in San Antonio. It is especially important to

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communicate in plain English and not technical jargon when you are talking to a non-IT business executive.

"You can have the greatest technical skills in the world, but without solid communication skills, who will know and can understand?" Jetton says.

Even if you have limited customer contact, writing skills are essential. Larry McConnell, deputy registrar for information services at the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles, in Boston, says that unless you can communicate, your career will level off.

Your job efficiency may depend on how well others communicate, as well. Joe Thompson, product support lead at Kesmai, an online games developer in Charlottesville, Va., says his daily work often depends on somebody's writing skills. Whether he's communicating with the test department or with a customer, Thompson sees writing as the key to effective two-way communication.

Even if writing is not your forte, you can improve your skills. Many companies offer onsite writing courses or send their staff to business writing workshops such as those offered by the American Management Association and other training organizations.

Pete McGarahan, executive director of the Help Desk Institute, in San Francisco, says one of the best investments of his career was hiring a trainer to teach business writing for IT professionals.

Check out writing courses at colleges and community education programs, as well.

"College-level courses in English composition and creative writing help broaden skills beyond the technical 'myopia' common to many IT professionals, enabling them to establish rapport and truly communicate with their clients," Cunningham says.

Good writing requires practice. AITP's Jetton suggests becoming involved in community volunteer opportunities or professional societies, where you can work on newsletters or write committee reports.

"Communication skills are an ever-evolving skill set," Jetton says. "You never have enough practice."

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How good writing can help you advance

- Increases customer satisfaction
- Saves time
- Improves communication across the organization
- Enhances your professional image
- Contributes to business success
- Raises your professional status

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Common Writing Mistakes and Their Corrections

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Contents

Proper Use of the American English Language   Top

its vs. it's vs. its' (the most common mistake by a *very* wide margin)

- "its" = "belonging to it"
- "it's" = contraction for "it is"
- its' (with the apostrophe at the end of the word) is meaningless
- remember these by comparing them to "he" and "she" with which you are more familiar:
    - "his" and "her" = "belonging to him" and "belonging to her" (note that there are no apostrophes)
    - "he's" and "she's" = contractions for "he is" and "she is"
    - hes' and shes' are meaningless
- the following table is another way to visualize and remember all this

    Possessive Forms
    note that NONE has an apostrophe
    he   ->   his
    she   ->   her
    it   ->   its

    Contraction Forms
    note that ALL have apostrophes
    he's   ->   he is
    she's ->   she is
    it's   ->   it is

ATM's vs. ATMs

- when you pluralize a mnemonic, don't use an apostrophe (ATMs is the correct form)

possessiveness: the user's vs. the users'

- the user's = belonging to a single user
- the users' = belonging to all the users as a group

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i.e. vs. *e.g.*

- these are so commonly incorrectly used and misunderstood that I recommend that they not be used
    - instead, write out "that is" and "for example"
- but if you do use them, be sure to use the correctly
    - *i.e.* = *id est* (Latin), meaning "that is"
    - *e.g.* = *exempli gratia* (Latin), meaning "for example"
- usage
    - don't put in parentheses
    - set off in commas
    - write in italics because they're abbreviations for Latin phrases
- examples
    Some operating systems, *e.g.*, MacOS, have windowed user interfaces.
    Our operating system, *i.e.*, basic UNIX, does not.

to vs. too (a *very* common error)

- to = starts verb infinitives ("to action"), prepositions, etc.
- too = "also"

commonly used excess words

- use "use" to replace "utilization"
- use "to" to replace "in order to"
- use "due to" to replace "because of"
- use "type" instead of "type in"

commonly misspelled words

- "consistent," not "consistant"
- "their" vs. "there" vs. "they're"
- "aggravate," not "aggrivate"
- "definite," not "definate"

common mistakes in capitalization

- the words "Web" and "Internet" are usually capitalized, but some publications no longer capitalize them
- "Web site" is usually two words with the first word capitalized, but some publications now use "website"
- the names of computer languages like "Java" and "Perl" and "Scheme" are always capitalized because they're mostly trademarked names
- "HTML" must be written in all capital letters because it's an acronym
- note the special spelling of words that are registered trademarks, like "JavaServer Pages" and "JavaScript"
    - these are trademarks, and in formal writing would even have TM after them as a superscript the first time they are used
        - in HTML, superscripts are created with `<sup>...</sup>` tags
    - *example:* We are using the Tomcat server to host our JavaServer[TM] Pages.

common word mistakes

- use "who" for people, "that" for things
- "pop up" is a verb ("a dialog box will pop up…"), while "popup" is an adjective ("the popup menu will contain…")
    - a "pop-up" (used as a noun) is a high fly ball in baseball!
- use "clarity," not "clearness"
- use "inexperienced," not "unexperienced"
- use "through," not "thru"
- don't use: "these being," "the result being," "the reason being"
- "up-to-date" is hyphenated
- "online" is one word and is not hyphenated, although some people prefer to hyphenate it; whatever you do, be consistent
- "straightforward" is one word
- "right-hand" and "left-hand," like most compound words, are hyphenated when they are used as

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    adjectives
- people *have* education—you can't take it away except by killing them, therefore the only time you use the past tense when you talk about a person's education is if they're deceased
- "input" is not a verb even though we in computer science often use it as such; write that the user "enters data," not "inputs data," and in the past tense use "entered" instead of "inputted"
- "effect" is a noun, while "affect" is a verb

don't use archaic words just to sound formal or academic

- use "will" instead of "shall"

if … then

- in most cases, leave out the "then"
- *wrong:* If the user presses the F1 key, then the system displays a help window.
- *right:* If the user presses the F1 key, the system displays a help window.

excess commas are common

- read your work aloud to see where commas should be eliminated
- but add commas if they increase readability
- don't separate a verb from its subject by a comma
  - for example, write:
    Mrs. Bush wore a yellow ribbon and waved enthusiatically to the troops.
  - instead of:
    Mrs. Bush wore a yellow ribbon, and waved enthusiatically to the troops.
  - however, if you have long clauses and want to include a comma for readability, you can do so if you repeat the subject (or use a pronoun):
    Mrs. Bush wore a yellow ribbon, and she waved enthusiatically to the troops.

subject/verb agreement -- singular subject requires singular verb

- use "each … has" instead of "each … have"
- use "all … have" instead of "all … has"

subject/object and pronoun agreement -- singular subject requires singular object or pronoun

- use "the user … he or she" instead of "the user … they"
- use "the user … his or her" instead of "the user … their"
- if you want to avoid the awkwardness of writing "he or she" and "his or her" and avoid the gender problem altogether, use plural subjects, as in "users … they"

avoid prepositional phrases, wordiness, and redundancy

- "The output of the program …" should be "The program output …"
- "The program should be a user-friendly piece of software which produces output in tabular form." should be "The program should be user-friendly and produce tabular output."

write in active rather than passive voice

- "The people who [*sic* — "who" should be "whom"] you will be writing this program for are my parents." should be "You will be writing this program for my parents."
- "The program should be written with a graphical user interface." should be "Write the program with a graphical user interface."
- "I recommend that a help function be implemented." should be "I recommend that you implement a help function."

write less, not more

- use short sentences — they are clearer and more direct
- fewer words = clearer message

refer to users in the plural and use "who," not "that"

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- refer to "users" rather than "the user" so that you can use the plural pronoun, "they," rather than "he or she"
- use "who" when referring to people, not "that"
- use "that" when referring to things

make lists stand out

- arrange vertically and use bullets to break up your text
- if you list items within the text, use words like "first" and "second" instead of "firstly" and "secondly"

proofreading your work

- ask a friend to read your paper
- read the paper aloud — if you stumble over the words, I probably will, too

Paper Layout and Formatting   Top

margins

- leave 1½ inch at the left of your paper
- leave 1 inch at the right, top, and bottom

include at least the following on your title page

- paper title
- your name
- date
- course information

put headers and footers on each page – at a minimum, these should include:

- the paper title
- your name
- the date the paper was written
- the page number

orient landscape pages so that the bottom of the page is to the right

use heads to separate and draw attention to major sections

- title centered on first page
- major section heads left-justified in uppercase
- minor section heads left-justified in mixed case (only capitalize first letter of major words)
- do not put colons (:) after heads

fonts

- in printed documents, heads are typically in a plain, sans-serifed font like Arial or Helvetica, while text is typically in a serifed font such as Times Roman or Times New Roman
  - serifs are the little lines on letters
  - compare:
    - *sans-serifed:* University of Massachusetts Lowell
    - *serifed:*   University of Massachusetts Lowell
- on web pages, due to the relatively large size of pixels, it is best to use non-serifed fonts
  - the font that I use is called Verdana, which exists in the basic font set of both Windows and Mac operating systems
    - this font is a little thicker than Arial (Helvetica)
  - include a series of alternative fonts to give the browser choices if the font you specified is not installed
    - ```
      code {
          font-family: Lucida Sans Typewriter, Lucida Console, Terminal, Courier New, Couri
      }
      ```

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- code {
        font-family: Courier New, Courier, monospace ;
        /* Note: Use "monospace," not "Monospaced" (as in HTML listings generated by NetB
  }
- normal {
        font-family: Georgia, Times New Roman, Times, serif ;
  }
- blueverdana {
        font-famly: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif ;
        color: blue ;
  }

- use a monospaced font like Courier or Courier New or Lucida Sans Typewriter for code
  - I will use a `JTable` to display the data. (Courier New on my PC)
  - I will use a `JTable` to display the data. (Lucida Sans Typewriter on my PC)
- when you refer to built-in classes and DOM elements, be sure to spell them correctly with proper capitalization
  - *Java examples:* `JTextArea`, `JCheckBox`, and `JRadioButton`

emphasis

- use underlining instead of all caps
- use italics instead of bolding

leave two spaces at the end of each sentence before the first character of the next sentence

do not put spaces around punctuation marks

- spacing parentheses:
  - *wrong:* … the users did not know how to copy (cut and paste) text.
  - *right:* … the users did not know how to copy (cut and paste) text.

format short quotes from a reference as follows:

> … this level of integration will make possible what Michael Allen has called "Just In Time Learning" -- the ability "to provide instruction on the user's selected topic on demand" (Allen, 1989).

indent long quotes and include a reference at the end:

> Paul Tenczar, President of Computer Teaching Corporation, has argued:
> > While [computer-assisted instruction] authoring systems requiring little of no computer literacy can open the field to a wider pool of authors, a "programmerless" authoring environment is as limited as a doctorless hospital. (Tenczar, 1990)

choose the format in which to write numbers based on the number

- in general, write out (in words) numbers that are less than 13
- use Arabic numbers for most others unless they start a sentence
- do *not* write numbers in both words and symbols, e.g., "twelve (12)"

avoid widow and orphan lines when paginating

- a widow line is the last line of a paragraph printed by itself at the top of a page
- an orphan line is the first line of a paragraph printed by itself at the bottom of a page
- widow and orphan lines should be avoided

never allow widow headers

- headers should *never* be left at the bottom of a page without at least some text after them
- break pages before headers if you do not have enough room for at least two lines of the first paragraph following the header

look at the texts, published papers, and technical articles you read for formatting conventions

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- most printed papers are edited and formatted by professionals

typing quote marks when using variable-pitch fonts

- most word processors today provide "smart quotes" which use the " character for opening quotes and the " character for closing quotes
- when using smart quotes, always put punctuation marks *inside* the closing quote, not outside

> Jones described this technique as "a revolutionary step forward."
> "What do you mean?" he asked.

- if you do not have smart quotes in your word processor, use two back quotes (``) for the opening quote and two apostrophes ('') for the closing quote instead of a straight double quotes (")

Paper Organization   Top

strengthen conclusions

- summarize
- tabularize
- list relevant guidelines
- meet the objectives you state in your introduction

if you quote me, please make sure it's not just flattery

Grading Considerations   Top

I give major credit for conclusions that include *your own:*

- analysis
- synthesis
- evaluation
- interpretation
- suggestions for application

Proofreaders' Marks   Top

This is a separate file, linked here (adapted from http://www.m-w.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm)

Additional Links to Valuable References   Top

- Merriam-Webster OnLine: The Language Center
  - dictionary, thesaurus, and more
  - http://www.m-w.com/
- Dr. Grammar's *Frequently Asked Questions* page
  - answers to such thorny questions as when to use "accept" vs. "except," "good" vs. "well," and "i.e." vs. "e.g."
  - http://www.drgrammar.org/faqs
- Grammar Traps (Dept. of Agricultural Communication, Purdue University)
  - more answers to such thorny questions as when to use "insure" vs. "ensure"
  - http://www.agcom.purdue.edu/AgCom/library/traps.html

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RSS Feed:	Gas station without pumps
Posted on:	Sunday, January 18, 2015 10:48 PM
Author:	gasstationwithoutpumps
Subject:	Senior thesis pet peeves

Full article link: https://gasstationwithoutpumps.wordpress.com/2015/01/18/senior-thesis-pet-peeves/

Every week in my senior thesis writing class, I go over some of the things I saw in student writing that I think need to be fixed. I've decided to try to collect some of the notes here, though I doubt that I'll ever get a full set, since a lot of the talk is extemporaneous or prompted by questions. They are not in any particular order.

- One of the first things I tell students about the structure of a thesis, is that it must start with a clear statement of the research question or design goal of the thesis. (This is traditionally called the "thesis statement," but I don't use that term.) Without explicit demands to put the statement in the first paragraph, and (if possible) the first sentence, students tend to write pages of background material before getting to the point of their thesis. In journalism, this mistake is called "burying the lede", and it is just as serious a problem in a thesis or thesis proposal as it is in a newspaper article.

  Even after getting this instruction, a lot of students want to write about the overall goals of the lab they are working in, rather than giving the specific goal of their thesis. It sometimes takes two or three iterations before students get a clear, correct statement of the research question or engineering design goal that they are addressing in their thesis.

- One pervasive problem (often encouraged by the students' research mentors) is to write the entire thesis in the passive voice. Writing journal articles in passive voice is fairly common, and some people have gotten the mistaken notion that passive is somehow more formal and correct than active voice. But passive is wholly inappropriate for a thesis.The point of a thesis is to establish the research skills of the person writing the thesis. So most of the thesis should be written in first-person singular: I developed a new protocol … ; I transfected the cells … ; I analyzed the data … ; I hypothesize that … Plural is strongly discouraged—"we" should only be used where other people are explicitly called out by name. Passive voice, which amounts to an assertion that the actor is unknown or unimportant should be avoided.

  I don't want to prohibit passive voice, though, as there is an important use for it in technical writing, even in theses. That use is inverting sentences, to put the object before the subject: "X did Y" ➡ "Y was done by X". This reordering can be very useful for improving flow, which relies on putting the old information at the beginning of a sentence and the new information at the end of the sentence.

- Students often borrow figures from lab mates or from published papers to put in their theses, particularly in the background section. I'd like students to create their own figures as much as possible, but there are plenty of times when copying a figure is the right thing to do. What

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students usually miss, however, is the need to put an explicit figure credit at the end of the figure caption—something of the form "Figure copied from Smith and Ng [Smith and Ng, 1999]". A simple citation is not enough, just as a citation is not sufficient defense against plagiarism for copied text, unless there are explicit markings indicating a direct quotation. When a figure is redrawn or modified, the figure credit should have the form "Figure adapted from …", rather than "Figure copied from …", but the explicit credit is still needed.

One reason I object to copied figures is that students usually do a very bad job of it, copying a low-resolution image off the internet, often with screen-capture tools, so that the image in their thesis is blurry or jagged. Going to the original articles and extracting the PDF images would eliminate at least a little of the awfulness of the copies.

- Speaking of citations, students often ask what citation format they need to use for their theses. There aren't any standards for senior theses at our campus, but there are for PhD theses, so I suggest using that style. The PhD thesis citation style on our campus calls for parenthesized author and year format: (Smith and Ng, 1999). That style, though rather long-winded, has the advantage of not requiring the reader to keep flipping to the reference list to see what the citation refers to (a huge advantage in the days of microfilm, but slightly less important now).

  The citation list itself can be in any standard format—I prefer to have the list sorted alphabetically be author and using the full author names, article titles, full journal names, and URLs and DOIs when available. Many journals use a much terser style to save space, but having the full information is useful to scholars, as it provides some redundancy to help correct for typos in the citation.

- I have to tell a number of students about the concepts of paragraphs and making the first sentence of each paragraph be a topic sentence. Many of the students otherwise start stream-of-consciousness dumps of ideas that go on for pages with no internal structure. Stream of consciousness may have worked for James Joyce (I wouldn't know, as I could never read more than a page or two of his stuff), but it doesn't work for scientific writing. Every sentence of a paragraph should be supporting or amplifying the topic sentence.

- Students often have trouble with vague antecedents for their pronouns—particularly when they use "this" as a pronoun. I strongly suggest that they check every "this" and "that" in their writing, and if it is used as a pronoun, replace it with a noun phrase: "this technique", "this method", "this protein", … Where they can't find the appropriate noun to use, their readers certainly won't be able to figure out the intended antecedent. Incidentally, this usage of "this" is referred to as a *demonstrative adjective*, though it might be more useful to refer to it as an article (like "the" or "an"), since that is the position in the noun phrase that it occupies.

- A lot of what I tell students has to do with typography and copy editing, rather than with writing *per se*. For example, I tell them about the 4 types of dashes:

  hyphen -
  a very short mark used inside compound words, to turn a noun phrase into a modifier of another noun, or to mark the end of a line where the word continues onto the next line.
  en-dash –
  a somewhat wider mark (about the width of a lower-case "n") that is used to represent ranges, such as 1–10 or Jan–Jul.

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em-dash —
a much wider mark, used for sentence-level punctuation—somewhat like a semicolon or parentheses
a minus sign –
used only in mathematics, the minus sign is usually the same size as the en-dash, but has different spacing rules. The text marks (hyphen, en-dash, and em-dash) have no space around them (though some typographers will put thin spaces around em-dashes), but the minus sign has the same spacing rules as the plus sign (with different rules depending whether it represents a unary or binary operator). Basically, if you are not an expert in math typography, you should use LaTeX to typeset your math and trust it to do a better job than you can.

While I'm on the subject of hyphens, I usually tell students that when they use a noun phrase to modify another noun, they should hyphenate the whole modifying noun phrase. For example, the process of synthesizing amino acids is called amino-acid synthesis, and the pathway that does it is the amino-acid-synthesis pathway.

- A lot of biology acronyms and gene names are case-sensitive and start with lower-case letters (like tRNA, siRNA, dsDNA, p53, …). Sentences should not be started with uncapitalizable symbols. If you need to start a sentence with "p53", try "Tumor suppressor p53" instead. Sometimes just adding an article helps: "tRNA genes" ➜ "The tRNA genes".
- Biology papers have two major uses for italics: for new jargon terms in the context where they are first defined and for genus-species names (like *Escherichia coli* or *C. elegans*). The genus-species typesetting rules are a bit complicated —genus is capitalized, but species is not; genus can be abbreviated to a single letter with a period, if unambiguous; subspecies or strain names are not italicized. Italicizing words when they are first defined is a simpler concept, one which can be applied to almost any academic writing.
- There a few words that I object to also. Perhaps the most common problem is the ugly neologism "utilize", which is used far too often by students, when what they mean is "use". (The older meaning of "utilize"—to make useful—has disappeared.

Filed under: <u>Uncategorized</u> Tagged: <u>passive voice</u>, <u>senior thesis</u>, <u>thesis writing</u>, <u>writing</u> `Comments: 4`

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RSS Feed:	Gas station without pumps
Posted on:	Tuesday, January 27, 2015 1:18 AM
Author:	gasstationwithoutpumps
Subject:	More senior thesis pet peeves

Full article link: https://gasstationwithoutpumps.wordpress.com/2015/01/26/more-senior-thesis-pet-peeves/

I previously posted some Senior thesis pet peeves. Here is another list, triggered by another group of first drafts (in no particular order):

- An *abstract* is not an introduction. Technically, an abstract isn't really a part of a document, but a separate piece of writing that summarizes everything important in the document. Usually the abstract is written last, after everything in the thesis has been written, so that the most important stuff can be determined. Most readers will never read anything of a document but the abstract.
- Every paragraph (in technical writing) should start with a topic sentence, and the remaining sentences in the paragraph should support and expand that topic sentence. If you drift away from the topic, start a new paragraph! The lack of coherent paragraphs is probably the most common writing problem I see in senior theses.
- I don't mark every error I see in student writing. It is the student's responsibility to learn to recognize problems that I point out and to hunt down other instances themselves. Students need to learn to do their own copy editing (or copy edit each other's work)—I'm not interested in grading my own copy editing on subsequent drafts of the thesis.
- Every draft of every document that is turned in for a class or to a boss should have a title, author, and date as part of the documents. Including this meta-information should be a habitual action of every engineer and every engineering student—I shouldn't be seeing last-minute hand-scrawled names and titles on senior thesis drafts.
- Page numbers! Every technical document over a page long should have page numbers. If you don't know how to get automatic page numbers with your document processor, either stop using it or learn how!
- Earlier this quarter I said that I did not care what reference and citation style you used, as long as it was one of the many standard ones. I've decided to change my mind on that—I do care somewhat what style you use for the reference list. Use a reference style that contains as much information as possible: full author names, full journal name, dates, locations of conferences, URLs, DOIs, … . You may format it in any consistent manner, but provide all the information.
- Use kernel density estimates instead of histograms when showing empirical probability distributions. My previous post explains the reasons.
- Avoid using red-green distinctions in graphics. About 6% of the male population is red-green colorblind. There are color-blindness simulators on the web (such as http://www.color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator/) that you can use to check whether your color images will work. Modern gene-expression heat maps use red for overexpression, blue for underexpression, and fade to white in the middle. This scheme has the advantage of having the strong signals in saturated colors and the weak ones in white or pastels, blending into the white background.

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- Comma usage continues to be a problem for many students. I discussed three common comma situations in English:
  - Comma splices. Two sentences cannot be stuck together with just a comma—one needs a conjunction to join them. If a conjunction is not desired, an em-dash can be used (as in the previous sentence). Sometimes a semicolon can be used, but never a bare comma.
  - Serial comma. There are two different conventions in English about the use of commas before the conjunction in a list of three or more items. In American English, the comma is always required, but in British English the comma is often omitted. I strongly favor the American convention (also known as the *serial comma* or the *Oxford comma*), and I will insist on it for the senior theses—even for those students raised in the British punctuation tradition.
  - When using "which" to introduce a relative clause, the clause should be non-restrictive. That is, omitting the clause beginning with "which" should not change the meaning of the noun phrase that is being modified by the relative clause. Non-restrictive relative clauses should be separated from the noun phrase they modify with a comma. If you have "which" without a comma starting a relative clause, then check to see whether you need a comma, or whether you need to change "which" to "that", because the clause is really restrictive. Note: "which" is gradually taking over the role of "that" in spoken English, but this language change is still not accepted in formal writing, which is more conservative than speech.
- The noun "however" is a sentence adjective, but it is not a conjunction. You can't join two sentences with "however". You can, however, use it to modify a separate sentence that contrasts with the previous one.
- Colons are not list-introducers. Colons are used to separate a noun phrase from its restatement, and the restatement is often a list. The mistaken notion that colons are list-introducers comes from the following construction: theuse of "the following" before a list. The colon is there because the list isa restatement of "the following", not because it is a list. Note that two sentence back, I used a colon where the restatement was not a list. Similarly, I don't use a colon when the list is
  - the object of a verb,
  - the object of a prepositional phrase,
  - or any other grammatical construct that is not a restatement or amplification of what came before the colon.
- Most students in the class use "i.e." and "e.g." without knowing the Latin phrases that they are abbreviations for. I suggested that they not use the abbreviations if they wouldn't use the Latin, but use the plain English phrases that they would normally use: "that is" and "for example". If they must use the Latin abbreviations, they should at least punctuate them correctly—commas are needed to separate the "i.e." and "e.g." from what follows, just as a comma would be used with "that is" or "for example".
- Some students use the colloquial phrase "X is where …", when what they mean is "X is …". The "where" creeps in in some dialects of English to serve as a way of holding the floor while you think how to finish the sentence—it doesn't really belong in formal technical writing.
- "First", "second", and "last" are already adverbs. They don't need (and can't really take) an "-ly" suffix. It grates on me the way same way that "nextly" does. "Next" has exactly the same dual status as an adjective and an adverb, but for some reason does not often suffer the indignity of being draped with a superfluous "-ly".
- I recommend that students not use the verb "comprise", as few use it correctly. You can say that "x, y, and z compose A", "A is composed of x, y, and z", or "A comprises x, y, and z". The

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construction "is comprised of" is strongly frowned on by most grammarists—avoid it completely, and avoid "comprise", unless its usage comes naturally to you. "Compose" and "is composed of" are less likely to get you in trouble.

- "Thus" does not mean "therefore"—"thus" means "in this manner". Note that "thus" is an adverb, so there is no "thusly".
- "Amount" is used for uncountable nouns (like "information"), while "number" is used for countable nouns (like "cells"). There are many distinctions in English that depend on whether a noun is countable or not (the use of articles, the use of plural, "many" vs. "much"), but "number" vs. "amount" seems to be the one that causes senior thesis writers the most difficulty.

Filed under: Uncategorized Tagged: relative clause, senior thesis, technical writing, thesis writing, topic sentence, writing Comments: 1

View article...

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Ten Words
You Need To Stop
Misspelling
by The Oatmeal   http://theoatmeal.com

Lose
Opposite of win

Loose
Not tight

Pretend the extra **O** is a hemorrhoid on the word. Hemorrhoids are <u>never</u> tight.

man, I've got the WORST hemorrhoid

TIGHT, BRO!
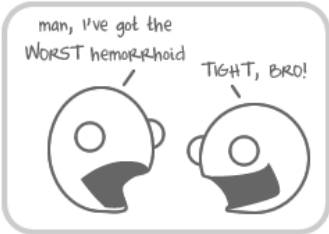
Weird
e then i
Remember it like this:

We ... ir ... d =
We ... are (ir) .... dangerous (d)
to those dumb, dirty dolphins.

<u>Not</u> wierd
Every time you spell it this way, a dolphin gets run over by a jet ski.

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Their

Their is possessive, meaning it owns something.

I hate our new neighbors.

Their cow keeps eating the leftover casserole.

In this case, *their* is referring to the neighbors who own a cow.

They're

They're is a contraction for "they are."

They're gonna get a shovel to the face unless they get that cow under control.

No one eats my casserole.

In this case, *they're* means "they are."

There

There refers to a place or idea.

Use this form if you're unsure.

Look over there!

An alien just burst out of that cow's chest!

In this case, *there* is referring to a location.

Abstract usage! I love it!

It can also refer to something more abstract:

There are many reasons to discipline a cow. For starters, a cow who eats rancid casserole will later become a host for alien parasites.

Your   You're

These both use the same rules as "their" and "they're."

Your is possessive. In other words, you own something.

Your new baby alien loves to cuddle, but he keeps crapping in your refrigerator at night.

This is referring to **your** alien and **your** refrigerator.

You're is a contraction of "you are."

You're definitely cleaning out the fridge tomorrow morning, assuming that little beast can't keep his bowels in check.

This translates to "you are definitely cleaning..."

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It's

↓

This is a contraction for
it is or *it has.*

If you can replace *it's* with *it is* or *it has,*
then use *it's* in your sentence.

For example:

It's not fair that Randy gets to ride a wolverine to school, but I have to ride this stupid manatee!

Confused by
apostrophes?
Click here to learn
how to use them.

Its

↓

This is indicating
possession.

Use this when one
thing owns another.

For example:
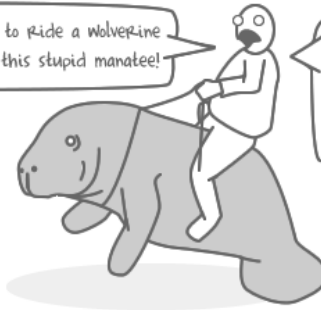
The wolverine knows only death, pain, and slaughter.
Also, its thick, black fur is good for exfoliating the thighs during a long ride.

↑

Using "it's" in this case would result in:
"Also, it is thick black fur is good for…"
which is wrong and anyone that does this
deserves to be mauled by a wolverine.

Definitely

There is no A in "definitely."

To help you remember, use this:

*If you put an A in
"definitely," then you're
definitely an A-hole.*

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Effect Affect

Most of the time *effect* is a noun and *affect* is a verb.

If you're unsure, try substituting a different verb and see if it works.

As a child, he was affected by his parents.

As a child, he was ~~affected~~ eaten by his parents.

A verb works here so you should use "affected."

C'MERE, RANDALL
I want to ingest you, just like I did your obnoxious parakeet

You ate him?!! But he sang only of love and beauty! You're a monster, Dad!

Weather   Whether

Snow, rain, sunshine, typhoons. All that crap.

I'm the sun, I make super happy sunshine!

Also, one day I'll explode and burn you all alive like the miserable little sausages that you are!

Whether is used in this way:

Your correct usage of this word will determine whether or not I kick you in the hemorrhoids.

Nothing gets a point across like a solid kick to the hemmies.

A lot

Always leave a space here.

Remember, there's a lot of space in outer space.

Alot is not a word.

You don't write *alittle, abunch, acantaloupe, aporkchop*

So don't write *alot*.

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Then
is used for time.

First I stole a panda bear, then we drank malt liquor together.

The sequence of actions indicates time: first stealing the panda, and then drinking.

Than
is used for comparison.

I'm much better at holding my liquor than a panda bear.

This is comparing a panda's drinking ability with your own, so you should use "than."

HRNNNGGGGGGGG BLORCH!!

The End.
Written & Drawn by The Oatmeal

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PROOFREADERS' MARKS

Symbol	Meaning	Example
ℳ or ℐ or ℐ	delete	take it out
◡	close up	print as one word
ℬ	delete and close up	close up
∧ or > or h	caret	insert here { something
#	insert a space	put one here
eq#	space evenly	space evenly where indicated
stet	let stand	let marked text stand as set
tr	transpose	change order the
/	used to separate two or more marks and often as a concluding stroke at the end of an insertion	
[	set farther to the left	too far to the right
]	set farther to the right	too far to the left
⌢	set as ligature (such as)	encyclopaedia
⸗	align horizontally	alignment
‖	align vertically	align with surrounding text
✗	broken character	imperfect
▯	indent or insert em quad space	
¶	begin a new paragraph	
⑤Ⓟ	spell out	set 5 lbs. as five pounds
cap	set in CAPITALS	set nato as NATO
sm cap or s.c.	set in SMALL CAPITALS	set signal as SIGNAL
lc	set in lowercase	set South as south
ital	set in *italic*	set oeuvre as *oeuvre*
rom	set in roman	set mensch as mensch
bf	set in **boldface**	set important as **important**

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Symbol	Meaning	Example
= or -/ or $\overset{\wedge}{=}$ or /H/	hyphen	multi-colored
$\frac{I}{N}$ or _en_ or /N/	en dash	1965–72
$\frac{I}{M}$ or _em_ or /M/	em (or long) dash	Now—at last!—we know.
$\vee$	superscript or superior	as in πr^2
$\wedge$	subscript or inferior	as in H_2O
$\updownarrow$ or $\vee\!\!\wedge$	centered	for a centered dot in $p \cdot q$
comma symbol	comma	
apostrophe symbol	apostrophe	
$\odot$	period	
; or ;/	semicolon	
: or $\odot$	colon	
quotation marks symbol	quotation marks	
(/)	parentheses	
[/]	brackets	
OK/?	query to author: has this been set as intended?	
$\downarrow$ or $\perp$ [1]	push down a work-up	an unintended mark
$\odot$ [1]	turn over an inverted letter	inverted
wf [1]	wrong font	wrong siZe or style

[1]The last three symbols are unlikely to be needed in marking proofs of photocomposed matter.

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