



Professional Basic English

Lecture 4

Jari Korhonen

jari.t.korhonen@ieee.org



Refresher from the previous lecture

- Basic advice for good writing style
 - Usually simple is beautiful: use concrete language and omit needless words
 - Express coordinate ideas in similar form
 - Keep related words together



Classroom task 1: good or bad style?

Because many people are using mobile cameras with limited capability, the photos shared in social media often have bad quality. Fortunately, it is a fact that the quality of photos can be improved by utilizing one of the photo editing programs, of which Photoshop is an example. Many filters are available for removing noise, sharpening, to make photos look more colorful, and adding artistic effects. Thanks to the photo editing software, we can enjoy more beautiful photos in the Internet.



Classroom task 1a

- Concerning the first sentence:

Because many people are using mobile cameras with limited capability, the photos shared in social media often have bad quality.

1) What has limited capability, cameras or people? How would you improve the first sentence to make it clearer?



Example answer 1a

1) What has limited capability, cameras or people? How would you improve the first sentence to make it more clear?

*Because many people are using **mobile cameras with limited capability**, the photos shared in social media often have bad quality.*

Example answers:

- *Because many people **use** mobile cameras **that have a** limited capability, the photos shared in social media often have bad quality.*
- ***Due to the limited capability of mobile cameras many people use**, the photos shared in social media often have bad quality.*



Classroom task 1b

- Concerning the second sentence:

Fortunately, it is a fact that the quality of photos can be improved by utilizing one of the photo editing programs, of which Photoshop is an example.

2) What needless words could be removed or replaced with shorter expressions in this sentence?



Example answer 1b

2) What needless words could be removed or replaced with shorter expressions in this sentence?

*Fortunately, **it is a fact that** the quality of photos can be improved by **utilizing one of the** photo editing programs, **of which** Photoshop **is** an example.*

Example answer:

- *Fortunately, the quality of photos can be improved by using a photo editing program, **for example** Photoshop.*



Classroom task 1c

- Concerning the third sentence:

Many filters are available for removing noise, sharpening, to make photos look more colorful, and adding artistic effects.

3) In this sentence, how would you change “to make photos look more colorful” to improve the style?



Example answer 1c

- In this sentence, how would you change “to make photos look more colorful” to improve the style of the sentence?

*Many filters are available for removing noise, sharpening, **to make photos look more colorful**, and adding artistic effects.*

Example answers:

*Many filters are available for removing noise, sharpening, **making** photos look more colorful, and adding artistic effects.*

*Many filters are available for removing noise, sharpening, **enhancing colors**, and adding artistic effects.*



Common mistakes and misused words

- Adopted from *Strung & White: Elements of Style, 4th Edition* and *IEEE Transactions instructions*
- Common mistakes
- Commonly misused words and expressions



Common mistakes (1)

- “*Data*” is plural, not singular: “*our data show that...*”
 - Nevertheless, singular use of “*data*” occasionally accepted
- Use “*alternatively*”, not “*alternately*” (unless something alternates)
- Use “*whereas*”, not “*while*” (unless referring to simultaneous events)
 - *Our method works well, whereas other methods fail*
 - (Compare to: *He was awake while the others were sleeping*)
- Do not use “*essentially*” to mean “*approximately*” or “*effectively*”
The results are essentially the same vs. *The results are approximately the same*
- Do not use “*issue*” to mean “*problem*”
Our results revealed a lot of issues vs. *Our results revealed a lot of problems*



Common mistakes (2)

- Note the different meanings of words that sound the same
 - **Affect**: usually a verb, “to make an effect”; **effect**: usually noun, “impact”
 - **Complement**: to make something complete; **compliment**: a polite expression
 - **Discrete**: individually separate; **discreet**: cautious, avoiding to offend
 - **Principle**: a fundamental proposition; **principal**: the most important one
- Prefixes “non,” “micro,” “multi,” and “ultra” are usually joined to the main word without a hyphen (*nonviolent*, *micrometer*, *multicultural*)
- Commonly used abbreviations: **e.g.** = **for example** (*exempli gratia* in Latin), **i.e.** = **that is** (*id est* in Latin), **et al.** = **and others** (*et alia* in Latin; note that there is no dot after *et*!)



Common mistakes (3)

- Avoid unnecessary phrases, such as *“needless to say,” “obviously,”* or *“as previously mentioned”*
- Don’t use *“This”* at the beginning of a sentence
 - *“This could be explained by...”*: is it clear what could be explained?
- Prefer simple, common words
 - *“Use”* instead of *“utilize,”* *“start”* instead of *“initiate”*
- Confusing *“that”* and *“which”*
 - *“That”* is restrictive: *“The article that was written by John is very good”*
 - *“Which”* is nonrestrictive: *“The article, which is very good, was written by John”*
 - Nonrestrictive phrase provides additional information that can be left out



Commonly misused expressions (1)

- “Among”: used when more than two persons or things are involved;
“Between”: used when each of them is considered individually
 - *There are bad people among the players; An agreement was made between us*
- “And/or”: best to avoid
 - *To get better results, we can work more hours and/or work more efficiently -> To get better results, we can work more hours, work more efficiently, or both*
- “Anticipate”: better to use “Expect”
- “As to whether” and “as yet”: better just “whether” and “yet”
- “Being”: not appropriate after “regard”
 - *He is regarded as being the best scientist -> He is regarded as the best scientist*



Commonly misused expressions (2)

- “Can”: do not use to substitute “may”
 - *You can be right* -> *You may be right*
- “Case”: often unnecessary
 - *In many cases, things get better* -> *Things get often better*
- “Compare”: use **compare to** if the objects are essentially of a different order and **compare with** if they are essentially of the same order
 - Life can be compared to a journey; Shenzhen can be compared with Shanghai
- “*Different than*” -> “*Different from*”
- “Fact”: only use about verifiable facts, not a matters of judgment

Commonly misused expressions (3)

- “*Factor*”: often best omit or replace with something more direct
 - *Talent is an important factor to success* -> *Talent is important to success*
- “*Farther*”: longer in distance, “*further*”: longer in time
- “*Imply*” and “*infer*”: not interchangeable. Something implied is something suggested, something inferred is something deduced from evidence
- “*Importantly*”: best to avoid
 - *More importantly, he paid us* -> *What is more, he paid us*

Commonly misused expressions (4)

- “*In regard to*”: often written incorrectly “*in regards to*”
- “*In terms of*”: usually better to omit
 - *In terms of accuracy, the results are not good* -> *The results are not accurate*
- “*Less*”: refers to quantity, use “*fewer*” to refer to a number
 - *We have less people* -> *We have fewer people*
- “*Like*”: do not use for the conjunction “*as*”
 - *We do it like in the old days* -> *We do it as in the old days*
- “*Literally*”: do not use, unless you really mean literally
 - *After running ten kilometers, I was literally dead* (really??)



Commonly misused expressions (5)

- “*Meaningful*”: usually best to avoid
 - *He made a meaningful contribution* -> *His contribution counted heavily*
- “*Nature*”: often needless
 - *Acts of hostile nature* -> *Hostile acts*
- “*Nor*”: use “or” instead after a negative expression; use “*nor*” with “*neither*”
 - *He cannot sleep nor eat* -> *He cannot sleep or eat, He can neither sleep nor eat*
- “*Partially*”: often confused with “*partly*,” only use “*partially*” to mean “to a certain degree”
- “*People*”: better to use “*persons*” with words of numbers, e.g. “*six persons*”



Commonly misused expressions (6)

- “*Secondly, thirdly*”: “*Second, third*” preferred
- “*Shall, will*”: the future tense requires “*shall*” for I, but “*will*” for you and (s)he; “*I shall*” expresses belief, “*I will*” expresses determination
- “*Split infinitive*”: do not put adverb between *to* and the infinitive, unless you want to emphasize the adverb
 - *To carefully study* -> *To study carefully*
- “*Than*”: be especially careful with possibly missing words
 - *I look more like my mother than my father* -> *I look more like my mother than I look like my father*
- “*While*”: avoid using to substitute “*and*,” “*but*” and “*although*”



Classroom task 2

- **Find the mistakes and suggest corrections**

Quantum computing is regarded as being the most promising topic between all the research topics in computer science and physics. However, there are several issues that need to be solved before quantum computers can be utilized for practical purposes. Firstly, the physicists need to develop more reliable technology to build and control the qubits in quantum computers. Secondly, the engineers have to build quantum computers with a meaningful number of qubits. Thirdly, we need the computer scientists to create quantum algorithms which can solve problems differently than classical algorithms.



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Summary

- Some common mistakes and commonly misused expressions covered on this lecture
 - Mostly those just need to be remembered, there are no clear rules
 - More examples can be found in Strunk&White