***Proper Use of the American English Language***

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 apostrophe*s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 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

*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 JavaServerTM 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 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”

* 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***

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, Courier ;  
      }
    - code {   
         font-family: Courier New, Courier, monospace ;  
         /\* Note: Use "monospace," not "Monospaced" (as in HTML listings generated by NetBeans) \*/  
      }
    - 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

* 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***

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***

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

* analysis
* synthesis
* evaluation
* interpretation
* suggestions for application

***Proofreaders’ Marks***

This is a separate file, [linked here](https://jesseheines.com/~heines/91.462/Resources/ProofreaderMarks.htm) (adapted from <http://www.m-w.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm>)

***Additional Links to Valuable References***

* [Merriam-Webster OnLine: The Language Center](http://www.m-w.com)
  + dictionary, thesaurus, and more
  + <http://www.m-w.com/>
* [Dr. Grammar’s *Frequently Asked Questions* page](http://www.drgrammar.org/faqs)
  + 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](http://www.agcom.purdue.edu/AgCom/library/traps.html) (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>
* [Yahoo! English Language Grammar, Usage, and Style page](http://dir.yahoo.com/Social_Science/Linguistics_and_Human_Languages/Languages/Specific_Languages/English/Grammar__Usage__and_Style/)
  + as you would expect, a large collection of links to helpful pages
  + <http://dir.yahoo.com/Social_Science/Linguistics_and_Human_Languages/Languages/Specific_Languages/English/Grammar__Usage__and_Style/>