
Lecture 38
Language Review

Lecture Outline:

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- Ornate Language
- Technical Terms
- Biased Language
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- Ageist Language
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- Ethnically and Racially Biased Language

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- Elements in a Series
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Abstract and General Language:

Clear writing consists of specific, carefully chosen words, not abstract and general language. Prose cluttered with language that is overly abstract, ornate, or vague becomes unreadable, either too dense or too vague to be understandable.

Vague Language:

Although the amount of detail in your writing will depend on your audience, use specific facts whenever possible. These facts make the difference between vague assertions and accurate scientific reporting.

Ornate Language:

- Use the simplest, most direct words possible.
- Used for their own sake, ornate words simply distract the reader from your main point.

Technical terms:

Technical terms are an essential part of all technical and scientific writing. Each field and specialty typically uses a vocabulary that relays a variety of specialized concepts by means of technical language. These special terms convey concentrated meanings that have been built up over significant periods of study of a field. Match terminology to the ability of the audience. You may use a term with great accuracy and still not reach your audience. It is important that you should be aware of your audience's level of understanding. If they are not experts in your field, you will need to substitute more general terms for your specialized terms. That means that you may not be able to write with great accuracy about your topic.

Biased Language:

Avoid language that could be interpreted as biased on the basis of sex, age, physical ability, or ethnic or racial identity. Instead, use language that is inclusive and avoids unintended stereotypes, and refer to people and groups using labels they prefer.

- Ageist Language
- Language Biased against People with Disabilities
- Ethnically or Racially Biased Language

Punctuation:

Punctuate your prose in order to help clarify how words, clauses, and sentences fit together.

Many scientific and technical organizations have detailed style guides outlining appropriate and inappropriate uses of punctuation for technical documents in their respective disciplines.

Follow the appropriate style in your particular field.

Detailed information on punctuation marks is given in the following entries:

- Periods .
- Commas ,
- Colons :
- Semicolons ;
- Question marks ?
- Exclamation points !
- Apostrophes '
- Quotation marks " "
- Hyphens –
- Dashes –
- Parentheses ()
- Brackets []

Introductory Elements:

Use commas to set off transitional words and phrases, introductory clauses, or introductory phrases to signal where the introductory element finishes and the main part starts.

Transitional Words and Phrases:

Place a comma after a transitional word or phrase that begins a sentence.

Introductory Clauses:

Place a comma after an introductory dependent clause.

Coordinating Conjunctions Joining Independent Clauses:

Place a comma before a coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses.

However, if the clauses are very short and closely related, you may omit the comma.

Elements in a Series:

Use a comma to separate items in a series. Although placing a final comma before the coordinating conjunction is often considered optional, omitting it can sometimes cause confusion. Consequently, most scientific and technical writing routinely uses a final comma in a series to prevent possible ambiguities.

Coordinate Modifiers:

Use a comma between coordinate modifiers. Modifiers are coordinate if they modify the same word. You can test to see if the modifiers are coordinate by inserting *and* between them. If the description still makes sense, then the modifiers are coordinate.

Non restrictive Modifiers:

Use commas to set off nonrestrictive modifiers.

A nonrestrictive modifier is usually introduced by *which* and contains information that is not essential to establishing the meaning of what it modifies.

Parenthetical Elements:

Use commas to set off parenthetical elements.

Elliptical Constructions:

Use a comma to indicate the omission of a word or words readily understood from the context.

Specialized Uses of Commas:

In numbers with five or more digits, Anglo-American usage dictates that there should be commas before groups of three digits, counting from the right, except for a group of three digits at the beginning of the number.

Example

Customers reported a total of **212,413** hardware malfunctions.

In **1994, 212** cases had been diagnosed.

Superfluous Commas:

Except after an introductory dependent clause, do not use a comma to separate a dependent clause from a main clause unless the dependent clause provides nonessential information.

Consider the following example

Placement of Commas with Other Punctuation:

Place commas inside quotation marks but outside parentheses.