

ChemE 3010 - Career Perspectives - Grammatical Style

During my seven semesters of ChemE 3010, I encountered grammatical errors common to many memoranda written by members of the ChemE Classes of 2011 through 2019. Below are recommendations to detect and resolve these errors.

- Avoid verbs with superfluous prepositions; eliminate unnecessary words and use a precise verb. Here are some common verbs with superfluous prepositions I encountered and my suggested replacements.

started off	began	make up	recover, improve, mend
showed up	arrived	find out	learn, discover, realize
have to	must	give up	give, donate
got to	must	give off	emit
go into	enter	slowed down	slowed
go back	return	get rid of	discard
figure out	understand, solve	get ready	prepare
think about	ponder, consider, contemplate	throw away	discard
let you know	tell you	am afraid that	fear
		take a risk	gamble, venture

- Avoid weak verbs such as “make” and “give.” In most cases, a weak verb has a direct object that ends in “ion.” Consider the following weak verbs and the stronger replacement.

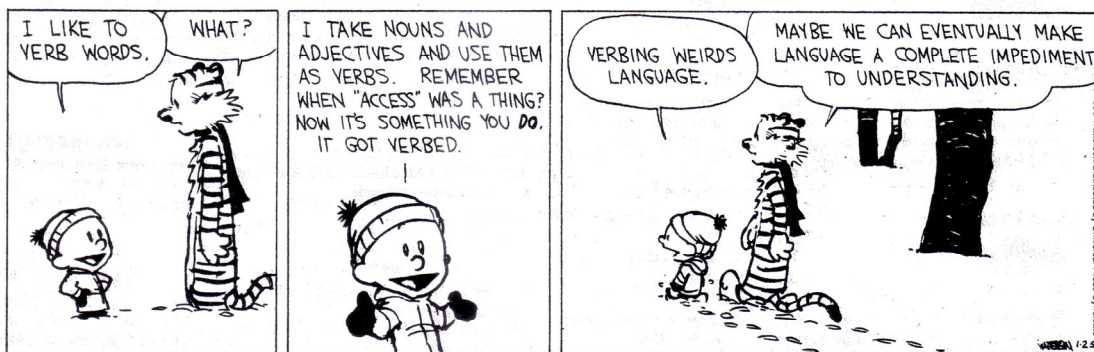
made a presentation	presented
gave an introduction	introduced
gave advice	advised

The Dude doesn't make abidements. The Dude abides.

- Do not verb nouns. "Friend" is not a verb. "Effect" is not a verb. The rule as stated violates this rule; “verb” is not a verb.

Calvin and Hobbes

by Bill Watterson



- Use precise verbs. The English language grows and some nouns are persistently used as verbs. Do not allow laziness to supplant precision. Do not use nouns such as transition, network, impact, dialogue, task, and party as verbs. There are always better genuine verbs.

- Always replace “in order to” with “to.”
- Never use “facilitate.” To paraphrase Yoda. “Facilitate not. Do, or do not. There is no facilitate.”
- "This" must be followed by a noun. Rather than "this was accomplished", write "this synthesis was accomplished".

- Write in a formal style. Colloquialisms, jargon, and slang are stylish but are the wrong tone and are a barrier to people outside the culture or profession. Do not use contractions, unless in a quotation. The only acceptable contraction is o'clock.

"wears many hats"	"functions in diverse roles"
"hodge podge"	"random collection"

- Avoid ambiguity. Stylish writing allows one to interchange "as," "since," and "because," but this can be ambiguous. For example, compare

"I am reading inside because the sun set,"
 "I am reading inside since the sun set," and
 "I am reading inside as the sun sets."

or

"Since the recession began, Jane has been in a PhD program."
 "Because the recession began, Jane has been in a PhD program."

Only "because" is unambiguously causal. Use "as" and "since" for temporal relations. Using "because" in every causal instance may seem repetitive, but it avoids ambiguity.

Likewise, "while" is for temporal relations and "although" is for causal relations. Compare "While it was sunny outside, I stayed indoors." and "Although it was sunny outside, I stayed indoors."

- Use parallel construction in lists. Compare

"My opinion varies with bean: I like garbanzo beans, I am indifferent to kidney beans, and green beans have always repulsed me."
 "My opinion varies with bean: I like garbanzo beans, I am indifferent to kidney beans, and I loathe green beans."

As stated precisely in Strunk & White, "Express coordinate ideas in similar form." *Please* read pp. 26-27 in Strunk & White.

- Avoid excessive adverbs, such as 'very.' "Use this word sparingly. Where emphasis is necessary, use words strong in themselves." *Strunk & White*, p. 63.

very little data	sparse data
a very loud blast	a deafening blast
a very unusual case	a unique case
a very accurate prediction	a precise prediction
very helpful advice	essential advice

- Use precise words. Do not adopt contemporary misuse. 'Literally' is not the same as 'figuratively.' 'Fantastic' means fantasy-like, unreal, or irrational. Replace 'fantastic seminar' with amazing, remarkable, outstanding, exceptional, or notable seminar for example. Similarly, 'incredible' means not credible, implausible, or unbelievable.

- "Data" is plural; "datum" is singular. Hint: When you compose a sentence with the word "data," test the sentence by substituting "data points." This should avert you from errors that appear in the NY Times, such as "There is very little data on ..."

- Do not state an intention in place of an action. For example, "pursued an MBA degree" should be "earned an MBA degree" unless the speaker left the MBA program without a degree. "Wanted to seek a finance career" should be "Sought a finance career."