During my seven semesters of ChemE 3010, I encountered errors common to many memoranda written by members of the ChemE Classes of 2011 through 2018. 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.

- 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.”
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.”


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.

Never use “facilitate.” To paraphrase Yoda. “Facilitate not. Do, or do not. There is no facilitate.”

“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 …”