Lecture 36
Language Review: Sentences

Stacked Modifiers and Nouns:
Avoid using long strings of modifiers or nouns. These stacked modifiers and nouns can be hard to read and sometimes create ambiguity. Add a few words (especially prepositions and conjunctions) to make the relationships between nouns clear to the reader.

Wordiness:
Say what you have to say in as few words as possible without sacrificing clarity or omitting vital information. Conciseness is desirable in all writing, but especially so in technical writing. Excessive use of the passive voice, excessive nominalization, unnecessary repetition, and unnecessary words and phrases are some common causes of wordy writing.

Passive Voice and Active Voice:
Use the active voice whenever the passive voice is not appropriate. Active verbs make for concise prose; sentences with passive verbs use more words. Moreover, passive verbs de-emphasize or even eliminate mention of the performer of the action conveyed by the verb.

Nominalizations:
Where possible, use verb forms instead of noun forms. Excessive or unnecessary nominalization (turning verbs into nouns) can make your writing wordy because it requires a noun and a verb instead of just the verb form.

Unnecessary Repetition:
Avoid unnecessary repetition. One of the most common types of unnecessary repetition involves modifiers that repeat information given in the word modified. we will discuss further a few examples of recognizing and eliminating repetition.

Unnecessary Words and Phrases:
Make sure that each word and phrase in your sentences contributes to meaning and clarity. Try to avoid the two commonly used constructions There is/are . . . And It is . . . . Delete superfluous material when you revise your first draft.

Overloaded Sentences:
Avoid sentences that contain more information than the reader can easily follow. Instead, divide such sentences into more manageable pieces that can be easily grasped.

Sentence Fragments:
A sentence fragment is missing a subject, a verb, or both, but is punctuated as if it were a complete sentence.

Comma Splice:
Never link two independent clauses with just a comma; this is known as a comma splice error. You can correct a comma splice in four ways: Separate the independent clauses into two separate sentences. Punctuate both sentences with periods. Replace the comma with a semicolon or with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb such as however or furthermore. (The conjunctive adverb is then normally followed by a comma.) Replace the comma with a comma and a coordinating conjunction. Make one of the clauses into a subordinate clause.
Fused Sentences:
Do not allow two independent clauses to run together without a conjunction or punctuation
between them. This error produces a fused sentence. To join two main clauses, follow the
options listed under comma splice.

Stringy Sentences:
Avoid stringing several clauses that would be easier to read and understand if they were
broken up into separate clauses. The following example makes the point of how incoherent the
language becomes with the use of stringy sentences.

Agreement:
Agreement between subjects and verbs and between pronouns and their antecedents is
important for paragraph coherence, as well as for style and grammar.
When editing your document, check for agreement, paying close attention to subjects, verbs,
and pronouns.
Make sure your subject agrees with your verb (subject-verb agreement).
Make sure your pronouns agree in gender and number with their antecedents (pronoun-
anteecedent agreement).
Make sure the form of your pronoun is appropriate for how you are using the pronoun in the
sentence (pronoun case).
For the sake of clarity, make sure your pronouns are closely linked to their antecedents
(pronoun reference).