Notes to Improve Writing

After years of grading writing assignments, the following are some recommendations to improve your writing and your grades.

- Use the grammar and spell checker for all written work. (MS Word & TurnItIn.com)
- The most common “error” noted is the use of passive voice. Although you do not have to remove all instances, I recommend you consider rewriting if there is are lot in your paper.
- All **proper names** begin with a capital letter. Proper names include all persons’ names (Mary Smith), the names of specific companies, universities, organizations (Amazon, Midwestern State University, Department of Defense). There are other unusual capitalizations such as the i-words from Apple. (iPhone, iPad) If you have doubt, google it. (In this case, google is being used as a verb, not the company, so lower case is acceptable.) It is now acceptable to use lower case for internet.
- You should begin a new paragraph when the idea changes. I will use the ¶ symbol in your papers to indicate where a new paragraph should begin.
- All papers should have at least 3 paragraphs. For short papers, the introduction & conclusion will be short.
  - Introduction
  - Body of paper (1 or more paragraphs)
  - Conclusion
- In formal papers (as in this class) do not use & for the word and. Do not use **etc**.
- Titles of books and periodicals (magazines, journals) should be in italics. (Old style used underline.) Names of articles, movies, and other “smaller” items should be in quotes. (Wired Magazine, “Rise of the Hackers”) Usually the words in the title other than small words such as the, a, and are capitalized, but you can capitalize the same way the publication/source does.
- Possessive nouns require an ending **s-apostrophe**, or **apostrophe-s**. (Matt’s phone, the mother’s child, Dr. Passos’ office)
- Run-on Sentences: Sentences that are too long and have multiple noun/verb pairs. A well-formed sentence usually will have at most only 2 separate components.
  - **Run-on**: Mat turned on his phone and saw an unexpected icon then he turned on the computer and he needed a pass code, which he had never set up, but finally, he found his iPad was also locked up and he could not use it.
  - **Better structure**: Mat turned on his phone and saw an unexpected icon. Then he turned on the computer and he needed a pass code, which he had never set up. but Finally, he found his iPad was also locked up, and he could not use it.
  - **NOTE**: One sentence about phone, one about computer, and one about iPad.
- **Verb Tenses**: Basically, there are 3 verb tenses to consider.
  - Past: You writing reflects something that has already happened.
    - Mat Honan’s account was hacked in 2013.
    - Joe ran yesterday.
  - Present: Writing reflects something happening currently.
    - You are studying computer science.
    - Jeff enjoys driving his new car.
    - I run every day.
  - Future: Writing reflects something that has not yet happened.
    - My email will be hacked someday.
    - Jeff will run a marathon this summer.
    - Joe will purchase a new car after he graduates college.
- All writing/papers must be well organized with information placed in a logical and easy to follow order. To accomplish this, a brief outline is recommended. (See next page.)
Developing an Outline for a Writing Assignment

Begin with the basic 3 parts: Introduction, Body, Conclusion.

Develop the BODY first. List IN ORDER the ideas that you will discuss. Sometimes YOU must decide the ideas to discuss. Other times, you will be given this as part of the question or assignment, as you were in the first writing homework.

- What happened to Mat Honan?
- How did it happen?
- Who did the hacking?

Once you have the list of ideas, organize the thoughts within each topic.

- What happened to Mat Honan?
  - Turned on iPhone
  - Opened laptop
  - Check iPad
  - Blogged about his experience

Write each main idea as a separate paragraph. If some paragraphs are very short and/or 2 of the paragraphs are closely related, you may want to combine 2 paragraphs into one.

Develop the CONCLUSION once the body is complete. In YOUR OWN WORDS, state 2 or 3 main points to be learned from the body.

- Hacking can happen to anyone.
- We should make efforts to protect our data and equipment.

Develop the INTRODUCTION last. Write a few sentences (2 to 5 for a short paper) to help the reader understand what is coming in the body. You may use the similar points as in the conclusion but in a slightly different way.

- Hacking is becoming a problem for many people.
- We will discuss a particular case to demonstrate how it can happen.