

Regular Lecture 4

Words and Phrases

Prof. Dr. Jasmin Blanchette

Chair of Theoretical Computer Science and
Theorem Proving

Version of September 16, 2026



Words

The Traditional Parts of Speech

Parts of speech are the **word types**.

Traditionally, English grammars distinguish between eight parts of speech:

- ▶ **nouns** (e.g., *computer*);
- ▶ **pronouns** (e.g., *you*);
- ▶ **verbs** (e.g., *eat*);
- ▶ **adjectives** (e.g., *appropriate*);
- ▶ **adverbs** (e.g., *however*);
- ▶ **prepositions** (e.g., *in*);
- ▶ **conjunctions** (e.g., *but*);
- ▶ **interjections** (e.g., *alas*).

The Traditional Parts of Speech

Parts of speech are the **word types**.

Traditionally, English grammars distinguish between eight parts of speech:

- ▶ **nouns** (e.g., *computer*);
- ▶ **pronouns** (e.g., *you*);
- ▶ **verbs** (e.g., *eat*);
- ▶ **adjectives** (e.g., *appropriate*);
- ▶ **adverbs** (e.g., *however*);
- ▶ **prepositions** (e.g., *in*);
- ▶ **conjunctions** (e.g., *but*);
- ▶ **interjections** (e.g., *alas*).

What matters is how words behave in a sentence:

But and *however* have nearly the same meaning but are categorized differently.

The Traditional Parts of Speech

Parts of speech are the **word types**.

Traditionally, English grammars distinguish between eight parts of speech:

- ▶ **nouns** (e.g., *computer*);
- ▶ **pronouns** (e.g., *you*);
- ▶ **verbs** (e.g., *eat*);
- ▶ **adjectives** (e.g., *appropriate*);
- ▶ **adverbs** (e.g., *however*);
- ▶ **prepositions** (e.g., *in*);
- ▶ **conjunctions** (e.g., *but*);
- ▶ **interjections** (e.g., *alas*).

What matters is how words behave in a sentence:

But and *however* have nearly the same meaning but are categorized differently.

Understanding the parts of speech is necessary to understand English grammar, which in turn will help you **write better**.

Nouns

A noun names a **thing** or a **concept**.

It can be a common noun (lowercased) or a proper noun (usually uppercased).

Examples of common nouns: *coffee*, *snake*, *summer*.

Examples of proper nouns: *iPhone*, *Python*, *Switzerland*, *The Da Vinci Code*.

Pronouns

A pronoun **stands for** a noun or another pronoun, called the **antecedent**. You should ensure the antecedent is **clear** from the context.

Examples of pronouns: *you, she, his, itself, they, whom*.

Below, *who* is a pronoun that stands for the antecedent *Jessica*:

It was Jessica who opened the windows.

Verbs

A verb describes an **action** or a **state of being**.

Examples of verbs: *be, has, fly, displayed, transforms*.

A verb is called **transitive** if it takes a direct object.

Otherwise, it is called **intransitive**.

Many verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively.

A transitive verb: *She ate lunch*.

An intransitive verb: *She ate*.

Adjectives

An adjective **modifies a noun**.

Examples of adjectives: *pink, wonderful, Austrian, many, this, such, five, my, which, each, some, the, a*.

An adjective as an attributive: *They bought a beige sofa.*

An adjective as the complement of a verb: *The sofa is beige.*

Adverbs

An adverb **modifies a verb, an adjective, another adverb, or an entire sentence.**

Examples of adverbs: *very, quickly, extremely, however, now, here, too.*

An adverb modifying a verb: *She ran quickly.*

An adverb modifying an adjective: *This color is very dark.*

An adverb modifying an adverb: *It all went really fast.*

A sentence adverb: *Unfortunately, there is no solution.*

Prepositions

A preposition **links a phrase** with another part of the sentence, indicating the relationship between them.

Examples of prepositions: *in, as, for, on, about, below, between, throughout.*

Three prepositions in a sentence: *Dongchen moved from Xi'an to Munich in May.*

Conjunctions

A conjunction **connects sentences, clauses, or words**.

Examples: *and, or, but, because, if, both-and, either-or, therefore*.

Two important types:

- ▶ **Coordinating conjunctions** join grammatical expressions of equal rank.
- ▶ **Subordinating conjunctions** join grammatical expressions of unequal rank.

A coordinating conjunction: *Prove or disprove the following statement.*

A subordinating conjunction: *Raise your hand if you know the answer.*

Interjection

An interjection (also called “exclamation”) denotes an **abrupt, brief remark**.

Examples: *alas*, *ah*, *well*, *ouch*.

There is virtually no place for interjections in formal writing.

Etymology

A word's etymology refers to its **origin**.

Etymology can be fascinating, but it does not give a word's true meaning.
For example:

- ▶ *thesaurus* is derived from the Greek word *θησαυρός*, meaning “storehouse, treasure,” but in English it refers to a book of synonyms.
- ▶ *muscle* is derived from the Latin word *musculus*, meaning “little mouse.”

A word's **true meaning** can be found in a dictionary.

Spelling

Even if spelling is your forte, you might miss a **subtle misspelling** such as *arithemtic*, *occurence*, and *acomodate*. Any spellchecker will flag these. But it might not catch *lead* in *This lead to an explosion*. (Change to *led*.)

Spelling

Even if spelling is your forte, you might miss a **subtle misspelling** such as *arithemtic*, *occurence*, and *accomodate*. Any spellchecker will flag these. But it might not catch *lead* in *This lead to an explosion*. (Change to *led*.)

Some words have **multiple spellings**—e.g., *judgment* vs. *judgement*. Often, one will mainly be American and the other, British, so you can simply choose the appropriate variant. In cases such as *formulas* vs. *formulae*, you can follow your preference or Google Books Ngram Viewer.

Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a **shortened form** of a word or phrase.
Some abbreviations belong to the written language (e.g., *Dr.* or *Dr*).
Others exist also in speech (e.g., *exam* for *examination*).

Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a **shortened form** of a word or phrase.

Some abbreviations belong to the written language (e.g., *Dr.* or *Dr*).

Others exist also in speech (e.g., *exam* for *examination*).

Written-only abbreviations usually end with a period (.).

However, in British English, the period is omitted if the abbreviation ends with the original word's last letter (e.g., *Dr*, *Mr*, *vs*).

Abbreviations

Two special types of abbreviations:

- ▶ An **acronym** is an abbreviation consisting of the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word (e.g., *ASCII*).
- ▶ An **initialism** is an abbreviation consisting of the initial letters of other words pronounced separately (e.g., *CPU*).

Abbreviations

Two special types of abbreviations:

- ▶ An **acronym** is an abbreviation consisting of the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word (e.g., *ASCII*).
- ▶ An **initialism** is an abbreviation consisting of the initial letters of other words pronounced separately (e.g., *CPU*).

In American English, some two-letter initialisms are spelled with periods (e.g., *U.S.*).

Abbreviations

Use abbreviations **sparingly**. They can be cryptic and off-putting, and are hard to find using a search engine. Does **AR** stand for *augmented reality* or *automated reasoning*? For such short phrases, do you really need an abbreviation?

Abbreviations

Use abbreviations **sparingly**. They can be cryptic and off-putting, and are hard to find using a search engine. Does **AR** stand for *augmented reality* or *automated reasoning*? For such short phrases, do you really need an abbreviation?

The Latin abbreviations *e.g.*, *i.e.*, and *etc.* are generally acceptable. Beyond this, *iff* (*if and only if*) and *w.r.t.* (*with respect to*) are acceptable in mathematical texts.

Abbreviations

Use abbreviations **sparingly**. They can be cryptic and off-putting, and are hard to find using a search engine. Does **AR** stand for *augmented reality* or *automated reasoning*? For such short phrases, do you really need an abbreviation?

The Latin abbreviations *e.g.*, *i.e.*, and *etc.* are generally acceptable. Beyond this, *iff* (*if and only if*) and *w.r.t.* (*with respect to*) are acceptable in mathematical texts.

Lengthy phrases such as *nondeterministic finite automaton* might conveniently be shortened to *NFA*. But often it suffices to write *automaton*. If you choose to write *NFA*, introduce it in parentheses at the first occurrence and use *NFA* from then on. It is good style to **define** virtually all abbreviations on first use and to avoid them in titles and headings.

Abbreviations

Use abbreviations **sparingly**. They can be cryptic and off-putting, and are hard to find using a search engine. Does **AR** stand for *augmented reality* or *automated reasoning*? For such short phrases, do you really need an abbreviation?

The Latin abbreviations *e.g.*, *i.e.*, and *etc.* are generally acceptable. Beyond this, *iff* (*if and only if*) and *w.r.t.* (*with respect to*) are acceptable in mathematical texts.

Lengthy phrases such as *nondeterministic finite automaton* might conveniently be shortened to **NFA**. But often it suffices to write *automaton*. If you choose to write **NFA**, introduce it in parentheses at the first occurrence and use **NFA** from then on. It is good style to **define** virtually all abbreviations on first use and to avoid them in titles and headings.

If you use a lengthy phrase only **once**, do not introduce an abbreviation, unless the abbreviation is better known than the phrase.

Plurals

Many nouns have both a singular and a plural form.

Regular plural formation adds the suffix **-s** or **-es**.

But there are many **exceptions**, including the following:

Singular	Plural
<i>appendix</i>	<i>appendices</i> (or <i>appendixes</i>)
<i>automaton</i>	<i>automata</i>
<i>basis</i>	<i>bases</i>
<i>corpus</i>	<i>corpora</i>
<i>criterion</i>	<i>criteria</i>
<i>datum</i>	<i>data</i>
<i>erratum</i>	<i>errata</i>
<i>formula</i>	<i>formulae</i> (or <i>formulas</i>)
<i>index</i>	<i>indices</i> (or <i>indexes</i>)
<i>matrix</i>	<i>matrices</i> (or <i>matrixes</i>)
<i>thesis</i>	<i>theses</i>

Tenses

English distinguishes between three main verb tenses:

- ▶ **present** (e.g., *walk*);
- ▶ **past** (e.g., *walked*);
- ▶ **future** (e.g., *will walk*).

Tenses

English distinguishes between three main verb tenses:

- ▶ **present** (e.g., *walk*);
- ▶ **past** (e.g., *walked*);
- ▶ **future** (e.g., *will walk*).

Both the past and the present tense are common in academic writing:

David A. Huffman invented the algorithm around 1950.

Our study confirms that system programmers prefer Rust to C.

Tenses

English distinguishes between three main verb tenses:

- ▶ **present** (e.g., *walk*);
- ▶ **past** (e.g., *walked*);
- ▶ **future** (e.g., *will walk*).

Both the past and the present tense are common in academic writing:

David A. Huffman invented the algorithm around 1950.

Our study confirms that system programmers prefer Rust to C.

When quoting Shafi Goldwasser, both *Goldwasser writes* and *Goldwasser wrote* work, but try to be locally consistent.

Tenses

The future tense competes with the present tense. Compare:

In Section 8, we will describe our experiments.

In Section 8, we describe our experiments.

Tenses

The future tense competes with the present tense. Compare:

In Section 8, we will describe our experiments.

In Section 8, we describe our experiments.

Knuth et al. recommend either of **two approaches** concerning tenses of verbs:

Either use present tense throughout the entire paper, or write sequentially. Sequential writing means that you say things like, “We saw this before. We will see this later.” The sequential approach is more appropriate for lengthy papers.

Moods

English distinguishes between five verb moods:

- ▶ **indicative** (for facts);
- ▶ **imperative** (for commands);
- ▶ **interrogative** (for questions);
- ▶ **optative** (for wishes);
- ▶ **subjunctive** (for conditions).

Moods

English distinguishes between five verb moods:

- ▶ **indicative** (for facts);
- ▶ **imperative** (for commands);
- ▶ **interrogative** (for questions);
- ▶ **optative** (for wishes);
- ▶ **subjunctive** (for conditions).

In modern English, the optative and the subjunctive moods are often replaced by the indicative mood. Compare:

I wish I were going.

I wish I was going.

They require that the resources be released at the end.

They require that the resources are released at the end.

Shall vs. Will

Should you write *we shall see* or *we will see*?

Shall vs. Will

Should you write *we shall see* or *we will see*?

Summary of the **traditional approach**:

“must”	“going to”	“want”
–	<i>I shall</i>	<i>I will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>	–
<i>she/he/it shall</i>	<i>she/he/it will</i>	–
–	<i>we shall</i>	<i>we will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>	–
<i>they shall</i>	<i>they will</i>	–

Shall vs. Will

Should you write *we shall see* or *we will see*?

Summary of the **traditional approach**:

“must”	“going to”	“want”
–	<i>I shall</i>	<i>I will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>	–
<i>she/he/it shall</i>	<i>she/he/it will</i>	–
–	<i>we shall</i>	<i>we will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>	–
<i>they shall</i>	<i>they will</i>	–

Traditionally, you would write *we shall see* rather than *we will see*.
Notice how the *I* and *we* rows are shifted to the right.

Shall vs. Will

Compare:

I shall drown; no one will save me!

I will drown; no one shall save me!

Shall vs. Will

Compare:

I shall drown; no one will save me!

I will drown; no one shall save me!

According to the traditional approach:

- ▶ The first speaker is expecting to drown.
- ▶ The second speaker is expressing suicidal intent.

Shall vs. Will

Summary of the **modern approach**:

“must”	“going to”
–	<i>I will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>
<i>she/he/it shall</i>	<i>she/he/it will</i>
–	<i>we will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>
<i>they shall</i>	<i>they will</i>

Shall vs. Will

Summary of the **modern approach**:

“must”	“going to”
–	<i>I will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>
<i>she/he/it shall</i>	<i>she/he/it will</i>
–	<i>we will</i>
<i>you shall</i>	<i>you will</i>
<i>they shall</i>	<i>they will</i>

Using the modern approach, you would write *we will see* rather than *we shall see*.

Shall vs. Will

You can choose either approach, but **do not mix and match**.
The modern approach is slightly less formal. It is also easier to use.

Shall vs. Will

You can choose either approach, but **do not mix and match**.

The modern approach is slightly less formal. It is also easier to use.

Regardless of the approach, beware of using *shall* instead of *will* with the second or third person. Example from a course's web site:

The course shall cover the textbook's first four chapters.

The course will cover the textbook's first four chapters.

Past vs. Present Perfect

Should you write *we developed* (past) or *we have developed* (present perfect)?

Past vs. Present Perfect

Should you write *we developed* (past) or *we have developed* (present perfect)?

Generally:

- ▶ Use the past tense for an action that took place in the past and is **not continuing now**.
- ▶ Use the present perfect tense when the action started in the past and is **continuing now**.

Past vs. Present Perfect

Should you write *we developed* (past) or *we have developed* (present perfect)?

Generally:

- ▶ Use the past tense for an action that took place in the past and is **not continuing now**.
- ▶ Use the present perfect tense when the action started in the past and is **continuing now**.

A gray area is the conclusion of a thesis or paper.

Both forms are widely used—e.g.:

We presented a technique to reconstruct a network from the observations of the nodes' phase dynamics.

We have presented a technique to reconstruct a network from the observations of the nodes' phase dynamics.

Above and Below

Phrases such as *the diagram above*, *the above code*, or *the table below* (but not *the below formula*) refer to material presented **before** or **after** the current sentence.

The material *above* or *below* does not need to literally occur on the same page.

Phrases

Personal Names

Suppose you want to refer to Emmy Noether.

Should you write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, or *Noether*?

Personal Names

Suppose you want to refer to Emmy Noether.

Should you write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, or *Noether*?

Here is a **reasonable strategy**:

- ▶ If the name is followed by a citation to a paper by the same person, *Noether* suffices. After all, interested readers can follow the citation.

Personal Names

Suppose you want to refer to Emmy Noether.

Should you write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, or *Noether*?

Here is a **reasonable strategy**:

- ▶ If the name is followed by a citation to a paper by the same person, *Noether* suffices. After all, interested readers can follow the citation.
- ▶ If no citation is present, write *Emmy Noether* the first time for clarity, then continue with *Noether*. Apply this rule regardless of how famous she is.

Personal Names

Suppose you want to refer to Emmy Noether.

Should you write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, or *Noether*?

Here is a **reasonable strategy**:

- ▶ If the name is followed by a citation to a paper by the same person, *Noether* suffices. After all, interested readers can follow the citation.
- ▶ If no citation is present, write *Emmy Noether* the first time for clarity, then continue with *Noether*. Apply this rule regardless of how famous she is.
- ▶ In the reference list, write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, *Noether*, *Emmy*, or *Noether*, *E.*, but be consistent.

Personal Names

Suppose you want to refer to Emmy Noether.

Should you write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, or *Noether*?

Here is a **reasonable strategy**:

- ▶ If the name is followed by a citation to a paper by the same person, *Noether* suffices. After all, interested readers can follow the citation.
- ▶ If no citation is present, write *Emmy Noether* the first time for clarity, then continue with *Noether*. Apply this rule regardless of how famous she is.
- ▶ In the reference list, write *Emmy Noether*, *E. Noether*, *Noether*, *Emmy*, or *Noether*, *E.*, but be consistent.

What about Professor? In most scientific writing, academic titles are not used.

Personal Names

Names with **particles**, such as Nicolaas Govert de Bruijn and John von Neumann, pose special challenges.

- ▶ When the family name starts a sentence, capitalize the particle.
- ▶ In the middle of a sentence, if the first names are omitted, write *De Bruijn* (following a Dutch convention) but *von Neumann*.

Personal Names

Names with **particles**, such as Nicolaas Govert de Bruijn and John von Neumann, pose special challenges.

- ▶ When the family name starts a sentence, capitalize the particle.
- ▶ In the middle of a sentence, if the first names are omitted, write *De Bruijn* (following a Dutch convention) but *von Neumann*.

Personal names from China, Japan, and some other countries put the **family name before the first name**. However, such names are often reversed to comply with Western conventions. For Yang Chen, is Yang the given or the family name? You can often find out by inspecting the self-citations in Yang Chen's papers.

Personal Names

Names with **particles**, such as Nicolaas Govert de Bruijn and John von Neumann, pose special challenges.

- ▶ When the family name starts a sentence, capitalize the particle.
- ▶ In the middle of a sentence, if the first names are omitted, write *De Bruijn* (following a Dutch convention) but *von Neumann*.

Personal names from China, Japan, and some other countries put the **family name before the first name**. However, such names are often reversed to comply with Western conventions. For Yang Chen, is Yang the given or the family name? You can often find out by inspecting the self-citations in Yang Chen's papers.

A separate challenge is to determine Yang Chen's **pronouns**. If you fail to obtain this piece of information, use singular *they*, or reword to avoid the issue.

Possessives

The possessive of singular nouns is generally formed with **'s**.

The possessive of plural nouns is generally formed with an **apostrophe** (').

Examples: *Monica's novel*, *the Müllers' textbook*, *Charles's* (or *Charles'*) *thriller*.

Possessives

The possessive of singular nouns is generally formed with **'s**.

The possessive of plural nouns is generally formed with an **apostrophe** (').

Examples: *Monica's novel*, *the Müllers' textbook*, *Charles's* (or *Charles'*) *thriller*.

There is a subtle distinction between the following:

- ▶ *Tremblay and Wilson's books* (their shared books);
- ▶ *Tremblay's and Wilson's books* (their respective books).

Possessives

The possessive of singular nouns is generally formed with **'s**.

The possessive of plural nouns is generally formed with an **apostrophe** (').

Examples: *Monica's novel*, *the Müllers' textbook*, *Charles's* (or *Charles'*) *thriller*.

There is a subtle distinction between the following:

- ▶ *Tremblay and Wilson's books* (their shared books);
- ▶ *Tremblay's and Wilson's books* (their respective books).

The possessive of pronouns is written without an apostrophe—e.g., *its name*, not *it's name*.

Pitfalls

Pitfalls

Adjectives as adverbs

A common mistake, especially by German speakers, is to use adjectives in place of adverbs—e.g., *the program runs automatic* instead of *the program runs automatically*. However, due to a phenomenon called “flat adverbs,” adjectives can be used as adverbs in less formal settings—e.g., *drive slow*.

Pitfalls

Adjectives as adverbs

A common mistake, especially by German speakers, is to use adjectives in place of adverbs—e.g., *the program runs automatic* instead of *the program runs automatically*. However, due to a phenomenon called “flat adverbs,” adjectives can be used as adverbs in less formal settings—e.g., *drive slow*.

Archaisms

Avoid old-fashioned words such as *albeit*, *behoof*, and *betwixt*.

Pitfalls

Adjectives as adverbs

A common mistake, especially by German speakers, is to use adjectives in place of adverbs—e.g., *the program runs automatic* instead of *the program runs automatically*. However, due to a phenomenon called “flat adverbs,” adjectives can be used as adverbs in less formal settings—e.g., *drive slow*.

Archaisms

Avoid old-fashioned words such as *albeit*, *behoof*, and *betwixt*.

Foreign words

Foreign words that are well integrated into the language need no accents or italics—e.g., *role* (not *rôle*), *naive* (not *naïve*). The French phrase *à la* (“in the style of”) is widely understood but informal. Rare foreign words are best avoided unless you explain them.

Pitfalls

Malapropisms

A malapropism is the mistake of using a word in place of a similar-sounding one, sometimes with comical outcomes. A few problematic pairs follow:

<i>affect</i>	<i>effect</i>
<i>compose</i>	<i>comprise</i>
<i>delegate</i>	<i>relegate</i>
<i>discreet</i>	<i>discrete</i>
<i>ensure</i>	<i>insure</i>
<i>parable</i>	<i>parabola</i>
<i>principal</i>	<i>principle</i>
<i>proposal</i>	<i>proposition</i>
<i>sensible</i>	<i>sensitive</i>

Pitfalls

Near-synonyms

Beware of words, such as *simple* and *simplistic*, that have almost the same meaning but not exactly.

Pitfalls

Near-synonyms

Beware of words, such as *simple* and *simplistic*, that have almost the same meaning but not exactly.

Noun trains

Avoid noun phrases such as *network packet traffic analysis tool*.
Use prepositions—e.g., *traffic analysis tool for network packets*.

Pitfalls

Near-synonyms

Beware of words, such as *simple* and *simplistic*, that have almost the same meaning but not exactly.

Noun trains

Avoid noun phrases such as *network packet traffic analysis tool*.
Use prepositions—e.g., *traffic analysis tool for network packets*.

Sticky words

These are words that stick in the reader's mind, so they should be used sparingly. For example, *also*, *but*, and *now* should be used at most once within a paragraph.

Problem Words and Phrases

Problem Words and Phrases

&

Spell out as *and*, except in the names of firms and such.

Problem Words and Phrases

&

Spell out as *and*, except in the names of firms and such.

all vs. all of

Both have the same meaning. Trust your ear.

Problem Words and Phrases

&

Spell out as *and*, except in the names of firms and such.

all vs. all of

Both have the same meaning. Trust your ear.

alternative

An alternative is *another* possibility. The word is not a synonym for *option*.

We have two alternatives means something else than *We have two options*.

Problem Words and Phrases

&

Spell out as *and*, except in the names of firms and such.

all vs. all of

Both have the same meaning. Trust your ear.

alternative

An alternative is *another* possibility. The word is not a synonym for *option*.

We have two alternatives means something else than *We have two options*.

as well as

Prefer *and* when both work.

Problem Words and Phrases

&

Spell out as *and*, except in the names of firms and such.

all vs. all of

Both have the same meaning. Trust your ear.

alternative

An alternative is *another* possibility. The word is not a synonym for *option*.
We have two alternatives means something else than *We have two options*.

as well as

Prefer *and* when both work.

assist, assistance

These can usually be replaced by the less pretentious *help*.

Problem Words and Phrases

associate with* vs. *associate to

Associate to is ungrammatical.

Problem Words and Phrases

associate with vs. associate to

Associate to is ungrammatical.

bound vs. bounded

A *bound variable* is attached to a binder.

A *bounded variable* ranges over a domain that is limited by a bound.

Problem Words and Phrases

associate with vs. associate to

Associate to is ungrammatical.

bound vs. bounded

A *bound variable* is attached to a binder.

A *bounded variable* ranges over a domain that is limited by a bound.

can vs. may

Prefer *may* for expressing permission, and use *can* otherwise—e.g.,
The user can scroll up and down using the scroll bar.

Problem Words and Phrases

associate with vs. associate to

Associate to is ungrammatical.

bound vs. bounded

A *bound variable* is attached to a binder.

A *bounded variable* ranges over a domain that is limited by a bound.

can vs. may

Prefer *may* for expressing permission, and use *can* otherwise—e.g.,
The user can scroll up and down using the scroll bar.

cannot

The negation of *can* is normally spelled as one word.

Problem Words and Phrases

associate with vs. associate to

Associate to is ungrammatical.

bound vs. bounded

A *bound variable* is attached to a binder.

A *bounded variable* ranges over a domain that is limited by a bound.

can vs. may

Prefer *may* for expressing permission, and use *can* otherwise—e.g.,
The user can scroll up and down using the scroll bar.

cannot

The negation of *can* is normally spelled as one word.

cf.

This Latin abbreviation means “compare with,” not “see.”

Problem Words and Phrases

compare with vs. compare to

With is the correct preposition when emphasizing the differences—e.g.,

She compared C# with Java.

To is correct if we want emphasize the similarities—e.g.,

He compared Napoleon to Charlemagne.

Problem Words and Phrases

compare with vs. compare to

With is the correct preposition when emphasizing the differences—e.g.,
She compared C# with Java.

To is correct if we want emphasize the similarities—e.g.,
He compared Napoleon to Charlemagne.

consider vs. consider as

Consider as is old-fashioned. Thus, write *The fact is considered relevant*, not
The fact is considered as relevant.

Problem Words and Phrases

compare with vs. compare to

With is the correct preposition when emphasizing the differences—e.g.,
She compared C# with Java.

To is correct if we want emphasize the similarities—e.g.,
He compared Napoleon to Charlemagne.

consider vs. consider as

Consider as is old-fashioned. Thus, write *The fact is considered relevant*, not
The fact is considered as relevant.

e.g. vs. i.e.

Do not confuse these. They mean “for example” and “that is,” respectively.
In American English, they are followed by a comma.

Problem Words and Phrases

compare with vs. compare to

With is the correct preposition when emphasizing the differences—e.g.,
She compared C# with Java.

To is correct if we want emphasize the similarities—e.g.,
He compared Napoleon to Charlemagne.

consider vs. consider as

Consider as is old-fashioned. Thus, write *The fact is considered relevant*, not
The fact is considered as relevant.

e.g. vs. i.e.

Do not confuse these. They mean “for example” and “that is,” respectively.
In American English, they are followed by a comma.

et al.

Be careful with the punctuation. The spelling is not *et al* nor *et. al* nor *et. al.*

Problem Words and Phrases

the fact that

Avoid this verbose phrase.

Problem Words and Phrases

the fact that

Avoid this verbose phrase.

fewer vs. less

Prefer *fewer* to *less* with countable nouns—e.g., *fewer lines of code*.

Problem Words and Phrases

the fact that

Avoid this verbose phrase.

fewer vs. less

Prefer *fewer* to *less* with countable nouns—e.g., *fewer lines of code*.

the former, the latter

These are often clumsier, and more puzzling, than the words they replace.
Use only if $n = 2$.

Problem Words and Phrases

the fact that

Avoid this verbose phrase.

fewer vs. less

Prefer *fewer* to *less* with countable nouns—e.g., *fewer lines of code*.

the former, the latter

These are often clumsier, and more puzzling, than the words they replace.
Use only if $n = 2$.

good, bad

Instead of telling the reader that something is good or bad, tell them *why* it is good or bad.

Problem Words and Phrases

in-, un-, non-, a-

All these prefixes denote negation. Check a dictionary to choose the right prefix in a given situation.

Problem Words and Phrases

in-, un-, non-, a-

All these prefixes denote negation. Check a dictionary to choose the right prefix in a given situation.

in general

The phrase can mean both “almost always” and “always.”
Be careful in mathematical contexts that require precision.

Problem Words and Phrases

in-, un-, non-, a-

All these prefixes denote negation. Check a dictionary to choose the right prefix in a given situation.

in general

The phrase can mean both “almost always” and “always.”
Be careful in mathematical contexts that require precision.

interesting

Avoid this vague word. Instead, tell the reader why something is interesting.

Problem Words and Phrases

in-, un-, non-, a-

All these prefixes denote negation. Check a dictionary to choose the right prefix in a given situation.

in general

The phrase can mean both “almost always” and “always.”
Be careful in mathematical contexts that require precision.

interesting

Avoid this vague word. Instead, tell the reader why something is interesting.

-like vs. -style

Compare *D is a C-like language* (i.e., “the D language is like C”) with *D has a C-style syntax* (i.e., “D has a syntax in the style of C’s syntax”).

Problem Words and Phrases

like* vs. *such as

When both work, prefer the more formal *such as*.

Problem Words and Phrases

like vs. such as

When both work, prefer the more formal *such as*.

little, big

As a rule, prefer the more formal *small* and *large* to *little* and *big*.

Problem Words and Phrases

like vs. such as

When both work, prefer the more formal *such as*.

little, big

As a rule, prefer the more formal *small* and *large* to *little* and *big*.

note that

Use this phrase sparingly. Often it can be omitted altogether.

Problem Words and Phrases

like vs. such as

When both work, prefer the more formal *such as*.

little, big

As a rule, prefer the more formal *small* and *large* to *little* and *big*.

note that

Use this phrase sparingly. Often it can be omitted altogether.

oftentimes

Needless variant of *often*.

Problem Words and Phrases

like vs. such as

When both work, prefer the more formal *such as*.

little, big

As a rule, prefer the more formal *small* and *large* to *little* and *big*.

note that

Use this phrase sparingly. Often it can be omitted altogether.

oftentimes

Needless variant of *often*.

on vs. upon

Upon is old-fashioned but still preferable in, e.g., *frowned upon*.

Problem Words and Phrases

like vs. such as

When both work, prefer the more formal *such as*.

little, big

As a rule, prefer the more formal *small* and *large* to *little* and *big*.

note that

Use this phrase sparingly. Often it can be omitted altogether.

oftentimes

Needless variant of *often*.

on vs. upon

Upon is old-fashioned but still preferable in, e.g., *frowned upon*.

orientated

Needless variant of *oriented*.

Problem Words and Phrases

prior to

Needless variant of *before*.

Problem Words and Phrases

prior to

Needless variant of *before*.

really, very

Use these adverbs with moderation. Often they can simply be omitted or replaced with a near-synonym such as *substantially* or *highly*.

Problem Words and Phrases

prior to

Needless variant of *before*.

really, very

Use these adverbs with moderation. Often they can simply be omitted or replaced with a near-synonym such as *substantially* or *highly*.

this/these vs. that/those

In informal speech, people tend to say *that/those* where formal English would call for *this/these*—e.g., ...*the duality principle. That principle ...*

Problem Words and Phrases

prior to

Needless variant of *before*.

really, very

Use these adverbs with moderation. Often they can simply be omitted or replaced with a near-synonym such as *substantially* or *highly*.

this/these vs. that/those

In informal speech, people tend to say *that/those* where formal English would call for *this/these*—e.g., ...*the duality principle. That principle* ...

thusly

Needless variant of *thus*.

Problem Words and Phrases

trivial

Do not use it as a synonym for *easy*. Similarly, avoid euphemisms such as *highly nontrivial* (for *difficult*).

Problem Words and Phrases

trivial

Do not use it as a synonym for *easy*. Similarly, avoid euphemisms such as *highly nontrivial* (for *difficult*).

unique

Use only when $n = 1$. In particular, never write *fairly unique*.

Problem Words and Phrases

trivial

Do not use it as a synonym for *easy*. Similarly, avoid euphemisms such as *highly nontrivial* (for *difficult*).

unique

Use only when $n = 1$. In particular, never write *fairly unique*.

utilize, utilization

Needless, pompous variants of *use*.

Problem Words and Phrases

trivial

Do not use it as a synonym for *easy*. Similarly, avoid euphemisms such as *highly nontrivial* (for *difficult*).

unique

Use only when $n = 1$. In particular, never write *fairly unique*.

utilize, utilization

Needless, pompous variants of *use*.

whom vs. who

Prefer *whom* to *who* for the object case—e.g.,
computer scientists, for whom this user's manual is designed.