**Unit 3 In-Class Activities: Numbers, Units, Abbreviations and Mechanics**

In the pre-class activities, you worked through questions to improve your stylistic use of numbers (and abbreviations/acronyms) when writing. In this in-class activity, you will broaden those skills by working on mechanics-based problems, before teaming up with a partner to tackle larger bodies of writing. You can think of writing mechanics as being an extension of the transitional techniques you learned earlier in the term; mechanics are the small parts of your writing that stick everything together to ensure that everything makes sense and that emphasis is placed where you want it to be.

For example, basic punctuation such as the use of a period (.), a comma (,), a semicolon (;), a colon (:), or the capitalization of certain words can give your sentences the meaning they should have when used properly. However, when used incorrectly, they can transform the meaning of the most basic sentence and leave your readers completely baffled as to what you are trying to tell them.

Consider the two versions of a short sentence that is interpreted completely differently due to the presence of a single comma.

**1: I am very hungry so we should cook Mom.**

**2: I am very hungry so we should cook, Mom.**

The table below (Table 1) contains some basic mechanics rules that you should apply when writing. This is not extensive, but will help you answer some of the upcoming questions in the in-class activities.

**Table 1: Basic mechanics rules to improve your writing, with do (good) and do not (bad) examples.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Mechanics-based component** | **Do** | **Do Not** |
| **Comma (,)** | - Use to split up sentences  - Use where there is a pause | - Overuse (can make your writing more confusing) |
| **Colon (:)** | - Use before listing items | - Confuse colons and semicolons |
| **Semicolon (;)** | - Use to join sentences with directly related information |
| **Capitals** | - Proper nouns (Rogers Arena)  - Names and titles (Dr. Jones)  - Abbreviations (NASA) | - Seasons (winter)  - Compass points unless part of a name (the north of England, but Northwest Territory) |
| **Plurals** | - Use when talking about more than one (rabbits) | - Unit symbols (kg not kgs) |
| **Apostrophe (‘)** | - Use when something belongs (Mike’s test tube) | - Confuse with plurals (test tubes, not test tube’s) |
| **Hyphen (-)** | - Use to link compound words (25-mile race) |  |

**Activity 1 (work alone or together, 10 minutes)**

Try to highlight the 12 mechanics-related mistakes in the paragraph of text that appears below, before providing appropriate alternatives.

**Writing effective, interesting science, stories is very important if we are to increase the basic scientific knowledge of the General public; doctor Richards believes that the overuse of jargon in science articles is one of the greatest crimes he sees from instructor’s at the university of British Columbia (ubc). He also believes that non-science students are put off by the following things. Wordy sentences, experiments that use techniques they do not understand, data analyses that are hard-to-relate to, and boringly unimaginative titles. These students, when polled by ubc Researchers also said they were unlikely to talk to science minded students for fear of not understanding the topics they would talk about.**

**Activity 2 (work alone or together, 10 minutes)**

In this activity, there are four multiple-choice questions relating to the mechanics of writing. Select the sentence written in the correct style for each question and justify your answer by explaining why the other options are stylistically incorrect. *[Hint: There are numbers and units-based errors as well as mechanics-based issues]*.

**1: You are talking about a study you would like to implement to assess student attitudes to science communication.**

A: I will first survey 300 science enrolled students about their attitudes.

B: I will first survey three hundred science enrolled students about their attitudes.

C: I will first survey three-hundred science enrolled students about their attitudes.

D: I will first survey 300 science-enrolled students about their attitudes.

**2: You are elaborating on your survey methods.**

A: I will survey a mixture of 18 and 19-year-old’s.

B: I will survey a mixture of 18 and 19-year-olds.

C: I will survey a mixture of eighteen and nineteen year-old’s.

D: I will survey a mixture of eighteen-nineteen year-olds.

**3: You are now explaining how the students will be selected for the survey.**

A: I will randomly choose from all 4000 science-registered students at ubc.

B: I will randomly choose from all 4,000 science-registered students at UBC.

C: I will randomly choose from all 4,000 science registered students at UBC.

D: I will randomly choose from all four thousand science-registered students at UBC.

**4: You are writing lists of the materials you will need.**

A: I will need the following: 300 UBC-approved copies of the survey

B: I will need the following: 300 ubc-approved copies of the survey

C: I will need the following; 300 UBC approved copies of the survey

D: I will need the following – 300 ubc approved copies of the survey

**\* Please note there will be a brief class discussion about your answers and the reasons behind them for Activities 1 and 2. \***

**Activity 3: Writing a story (work together, 10 minutes)**

Working with a partner, or in a team of three to ensure nobody is alone, take a few minutes to write a short creative story (no more than 100 – 150 words) that comprises the elements that appear in Table 2 below. Do not worry too much about making the story realistic or interesting, but make sure it is accurate in terms of style. You are going to need to incorporate rules that apply to using numbers and abbreviations, as well as general mechanics rules, to write a technically correct piece.

Try to write your story as quickly as possible (less than 10 minutes). Once you have done this, exchange it with your partner and have them read through what you have done and provide any comments regarding the style (and any errors they have spotted).

**Table 2: Use this table as a guide for all the components that you must include in your short story. Designate yourself as either Partner ‘A’ or ‘B’ and read the variations for each component to make sure you write a piece that incorporates the elements specific to you. If you are in a group of three, have two Partner As or Bs.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Component** | **Partner ‘A’** | **Partner ‘B’** |
| **Hyphen (-)** | Use at least once to formulate a compound word | |
| **Abbreviation/acronym** | Correctly use ‘National Aeronautics and Space Administration’ (NASA) throughout your writing | Correctly use ‘British Columbia Conservation Foundation’ (BCCF) throughout your writing |
| **Numbers** | Use at least three numbers in numeric or written form | |
| **Units** | Use metres and kilograms | Use millilitres and feet |
| **Capitals** | Try to capitalize at least two different words | |
| **Apostrophe** | Use at least once | |
| **Semicolon** | Use at least once to join related sentences together | |

**Activity 4 (work alone, optional take home)**

Take a few moments to go over the comments you received from your partner and see whether you made any technical mistakes. Once you have reviewed them, take a further few minutes to try to improve the quality of your story. This will get you in the habit of editing a first draft of your work to improve the quality of your writing.

This final exercise is not designed to take too long. Its purpose is simply to point out how important it is to refine both the content and style/mechanics of your writing. You produced a piece of writing in Activity 3 by focusing on the technical aspects and mechanics, rather than on actual content or fluid transitions. However, you will usually find it more effective to focus on drafting your content, spending less time worrying about style and the technical aspects of your writing. But this must be cleaned up later, and the more you write, the more you will avoid making stylistic or mechans-based errors in your first draft.