



Writing

Do it good

Who cares?

- Shows who you are
- Direct access, easy to scan and search
- Important for many types of advancement
 - Personal
 - Professional
- Good writing gives you authority / credibility
- It shows interest
- It shows commitment

Some myths

- People in technical fields don't have to write
- Writing is complex and full of (sometimes trivial) rules
 - Both of these are true, at first
 - However, as with everything complex, practice cures those ills
 - In fact, the same is true, perhaps even more so, with programming
 - Important to move beyond mechanics; C is more than the semicolons at the end of a line, and writing is more than the periods at the end of a sentence.

Some myths (continued)

- You're born with the ability, or you're not
 - That may be somewhat true for creative writing, but it's not true for critical thought and expression
 - Involvement – reading and writing – is the important thing. It's how you learned your native language.
 - For example, many people who don't speak English as their first language still speak flawless English
 - You can think critically already, it's why you're here. The mechanics will come with practice.

The importance of language and writing

- One of the major forms of communication
- Communication is important
- If there is a problem in communication:
 - Meaning is lost
 - Meaning is added, perhaps incorrectly
 - Meaning is changed
 - Goal is not met
 - Wrong goal is met
- These can have very serious consequences (or not)
- It's hard to write well
 - It's also hard to write poorly

The importance of language and writing

- Some notes about language
 - Structure
 - Syntax
 - Words aren't enough. Language can't be learned by memorizing dictionaries
 - Must put words into sequence and make sentences
 - Understand the rules for doing so
 - Language isn't learned solely by repeating, but by listening and extrapolating
 - You develop your own rules for understanding, and can then describe new thoughts (Nutmeg orangutan tattoos beef with boiled carrot – new, but you understand)
 - Standards are necessary, often adopted, and can change

The importance of language and writing

- Some notes about language (continued)
 - Structure (continued)
 - Ambiguity
 - More than one meaning
 - I saw the man in the park with a telescope
 - Is there a restroom on this floor, or do I have to go down the stairs
 - I couldn't understand why the baseball was getting bigger, then it hit me
 - You can wear anything you want as long as you can pull it off
 - Let's get in the car and hit a McDonald's

The importance of language and writing

- Some notes about language (continued)
 - Structure (continued)
 - Language changes
 - Terms and their meaning
 - Often an issue of slang
 - Slang, and language, change over time (40's, 60's / 70's, 80's, 00's)
 - Be very careful about the use of slang, casual, informal, overly-personal, double-entendre, forced, edgy, prurient, etc.

The importance of language and writing

- Some notes about language (continued)
 - Sociolinguistics
 - What's appropriate in which situation?
 - One on one conversation, simply need to get meaning across
 - Writing: Larger audience, removed from time
 - Permanent record, so longer, more elaborate sentences, thus rules of writing become very important
 - Can also depend on audience (your own grocery list vs. explaining a recipe)

The importance of language and writing

- Writing should be clear, concise
- Properly structured
- However it is very often:
 - Vague
 - Subtle
 - Cluttered
 - Uncertain
- Writing should be edited down, not up
- Remember: Words have power

The importance of language and writing

- Some assumptions
 - You have an idea of how to write
 - You have an idea of sentence-level spelling, grammar, and punctuation
 - You have access to a style guide and / or dictionary
 - You will ask questions if uncertain

The importance of language and writing

- Don't:
 - Pad
 - Overwrite
 - Repeat
 - Make unfounded statements
 - State opinion as fact
 - Be noncommittal
 - Use weasel words
 - Misuse words
 - Be cliché
 - Rely on grammar / spell checkers

The importance of language and writing

- Don't be noncommittal:
 - Kinda
 - Sorta
 - A bit
 - Not really
 - Go ahead
- Own your words, take responsibility for what you say

The importance of language and writing

- Do:
 - Write well
 - Use a dictionary
 - Use a thesaurus
 - Use a style guide
 - Examine your bones
 - Use only as many words as are necessary
 - Be complete
 - Support what you say
 - Answer your question(s), and those of your readers (anticipate)
 - Proofread (QA)