



Writing

Do it good

Intro

- Why are we here?
 - To improve our writing
 - To improve our ability to communicate
 - To have the time
 - Produce polished work
 - Not time in other CS courses
 - Not elevated, either

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
- Importantly, it shows you care

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
 - We understand it because it makes us more aware of our environment and enriches our experiences
 - Natural language vs. formal language
 - Structure
 - Phonetics (individual sounds, different languages)
 - Phonology
 - Morphology
 - Sounds form words and have meanings
 - Sound is often arbitrary to the meaning (House, casa, maison, etc.)
 - Except with onomatopoeia

The importance of language and writing

- Some notes about language (continued)
 - Structure (continued)
 - 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)
 - Over a very long time, major linguistic changes happen
 - Chaucer
 - Shakespeare (circa 1600) beginning of modern English
 - If two groups with the same language separate, language will as well
 - British vs. American English
 - Urban slang, and indication of isolation
 - Dialects throughout the U.S. (pop/soda, hoagie/sub/hero, Amish / Mennonite)

Chaucer

A cook they hadde with hem for the nones
To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.
Wel koude he knowe a draughte of londoun ale.
He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.

Shakespeare

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown

The importance of language and writing

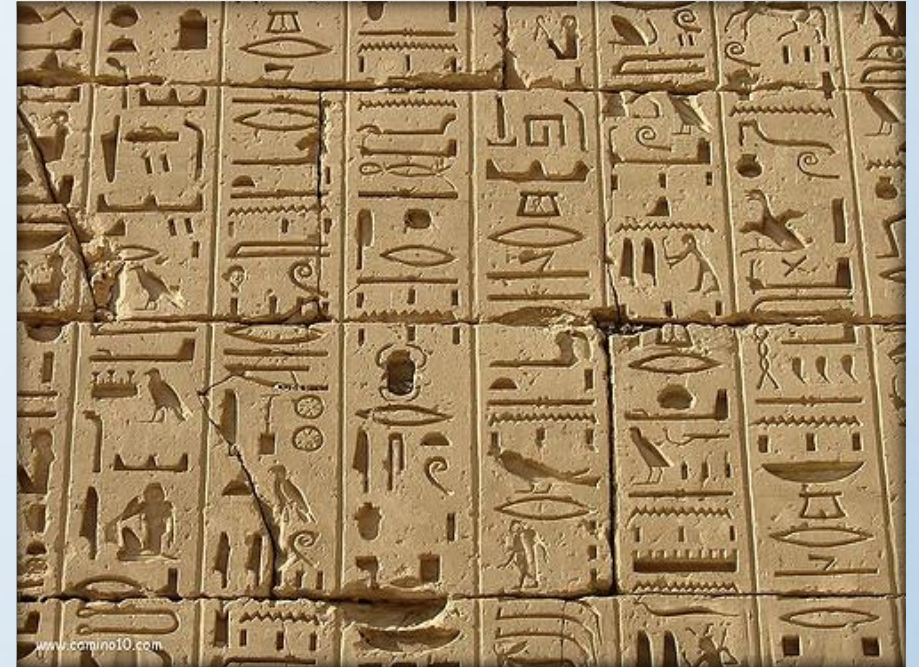
- Some notes about language (continued)
 - Sociolinguistics
 - What's appropriate in which situation?
 - One on one conversation, simply need to get meaning across
 - Writing: Larger audience, removed from time
 - Permanent record, so longer, more elaborate sentences, thus rules of writing become very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

The importance of language and writing

- Some notes about language (continued)
 - How we interpret words
 - I cnduo't bvleiee taht I culod aulacly uesdtannrd waht I was rdnaieg. Unisg the icndeblire pweor of the hmuan mnid, aocdcnig to rseecrah at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it dseno't mttær in waht oder the lterets in a wrod are, the olny irpoamtnt tihng is taht the frsit and lsat ltteer be in the rhgit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mse and you can sitll raed it whoutit a pboerlm. Tihs is bucseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey ltteer by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Aaznmig, huh? Yaeh and I awlyas tghhuot slelinpg was ipmorantt! See if yuor fdreins can raed tihs too.

The importance of language and writing

- Writing has been around for millennia
- Ancient writing styles
 - Hieroglyphics (Egypt, South America)
 - Cuneiform (Mesopotamia)
 - Phoenician (Greece)
 - Chinese (Logographic)
 - Latin (Rome)
- In some societies, writing was a regal profession
 - Not everyone could write
 - Scribes were held in very high regard
 - Most of what we know is thanks to them



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 and meaning, or nothing

The importance of language and writing

- Some assumptions
 - You know how to write
 - You understand 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 / Waste words
 - 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)

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Ask!

- If you have any questions about writing, phrasing, grammar, structure, or anything else, please ask; I am always happy to help.

