Grammar and Style Guidelines for Written Assignments
CSCI 3720 Fundamentals of Business Information Systems

For any page with more than 3 instances of a problem, or for any overall document with more than 5 instances of a problem, the point deduction for errors will be doubled.

I. Spelling (2 points per infraction)
   - Check your spelling on all printed work.
   - Remember an automated spell checker cannot find all errors. For example, it would not say that “four” is incorrect even if you meant to type “for” in a document.

II. Grammar (2 points per infraction)
   A. Make the subject and verb agree with each other.
      - Singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs.
      - Common areas of mistakes
         - Sometimes modifiers will be between a subject and its verb, but these modifiers must not confuse the agreement between the subject and its verb.
           - Problem example: The cart, as well as its contents, were gone.
           - Corrected example: The cart, as well as its contents, was gone.
         - The indefinite pronouns anyone, everyone, someone, no one, nobody, etc. are always singular and, therefore, require singular verbs.
         - Some indefinite pronouns — such as all, some — are singular or plural depending on what they’re referring to. Be careful choosing a verb to accompany such pronouns.
           - Some of the beads are missing.
           - Some of the water is gone.
         - When using subjunctive voice, a plural verb form is used, even with a singular noun.
           - If I were to buy a new car, it would have a high-end radio.
   B. Avoid run-on sentences.
      - A run-on sentence has at least two parts, either one of which can stand by itself (in other words, two independent clauses), but the two parts have been written together without being properly connected.
        - Problem example: The sun is high, you need to put on some sunscreen.
        - Corrected example: The sun is high; you need to put on some sunscreen.
      - Common ways to join two independent clauses or sentences:
        - a comma followed by a conjunction (sentence, and sentence),
        - a semicolon alone (sentence; sentence), or
        - a semicolon followed by a sentence modifier (sentence; however, sentence).
   C. Avoid sentence fragments.
      - A sentence fragment fails to be a sentence in the sense that it cannot stand by itself. Make sure that you have a subject and verb that expresses a complete thought.
        - Problem example: Some of the students working in Professor Espinoza's laboratory last semester.
        - Corrected example: Some of the students were working in Professor Espinoza's laboratory last semester.
D. Use commas properly.
- In a series of items, after an introductory phrase or clause, and on dates.
  - In a series of items, be sure to include the comma before the conjunction.
    - Problem example: I like apples, oranges, watermelon and strawberries.
    - Corrected example: I like apples, oranges, watermelon, and strawberries.
  - When beginning a sentence with an introductory phrase or an introductory (dependent) clause, include a comma after the phrase or clause.
    - Problem example: When the bell rang the students left the room.
    - Corrected example: When the bell rang, the students left the room.
    - Exception: Short introductory phrases can omit the comma. Example: In 1969 man landed on the moon.
  - In writing dates, November 2005 is correct, but November, 2005 is incorrect. November 26, 2005 is also correct.
  - Don’t separate a subject and verb with a comma.

E. Use pronouns correctly.
- Correct possessive pronouns are “his” or “her” with singular nouns and “their” with plural nouns.
  - Problem example: Everyone loves their class schedule.
  - Corrected example: Everyone loves his or her class schedule.
- Correct relative pronouns are “who” for the subject of a sentence, “whom” for the object of a sentence or prepositional phrase, and “whose” for showing possession.
  - Problem example: The coach will select whoever he pleases.
  - Corrected example: The coach will select whomever he pleases.

F. Use colons to introduce lists.
- Do not use a colon after a verb.
  - Problem example: My favorite vegetables are: carrots, lettuce, and spinach.
  - Corrected example: My favorite vegetables are the following: carrots, lettuce, and spinach.
    OR My favorite vegetables are carrots, lettuce, and spinach.

G. Hyphenate compound words that are used as an adjective.
- For example, in "open-book exam," the phrase "open-book" is used as an adjective for the noun "exam."

H. Use likeness of form and content when writing parallel constructions.
- The likeness of form enables the reader to recognize more readily the similarity of content and function. This rule also holds true for bulleted lists.
  - Problem example: My hobbies are playing cards, running, and to read.
  - Corrected example: My hobbies are playing cards, running, and reading.

I. Use standard capitalization.
- Capitalize the first word of a sentence, major words in the title of a work, proper nouns or names, and personal titles when they come before a name (e.g., Dean Brown is capitalized, but the dean is not.).
- Capitalize all (or most) letters in an abbreviation.

J. Use period at the end of each sentence (unless the sentence is a question).
K. Place modifiers near the words they modify.
   - Problem: I saw a deer driving down the interstate.
   - Corrected: While driving down the interstate, I saw a deer.

III. Style (2 points per infraction)

A. Use present tense.
   - When writing in formal papers, write about the action in present tense. (he is, goes, feels not he was, went, felt).
   - When writing about real events, use the appropriate (time) tense.

B. Use the correct person.
   - Avoid “I think…” or “In my opinion…” statements. Drop them off and use the remainder of the sentence.
   - Avoid using “you” as a general address or to address the reader 99% of the time. 1% of the time it can be used for impact or as a stylistic device.
   - Write in the third person in formal academic writing. (Omit words like I, me, my, you, your, our, etc. except in direct quotations.)

C. Do not use contractions in formal writing.
   - Write out words instead of using contractions; for example, use “do not” instead of “don’t.”
   - Many spelling errors are really problems with using apostrophes in contractions incorrectly.
   - It’s is a contraction of “it is” and not the possessive of it.

D. "This" and “these” should be followed by a noun.
   - Instead of saying "this is red," you should be more specific with "this ball is red."
   - If you leave it out, your reader may mentally insert a different noun than you had in mind.
   - Things that are not ambiguous to you can be ambiguous to your reader.

E. Avoid using “there are” or “there is” to begin a sentence.

F. Avoid slang and other nonstandard English.

G. Use a thesis sentence to encapsulate the major point of the paper.
   - It is common for this sentence to appear as the last sentence in the introduction of the paper.

H. State thoughts in the fewest possible words, while retaining clarity.